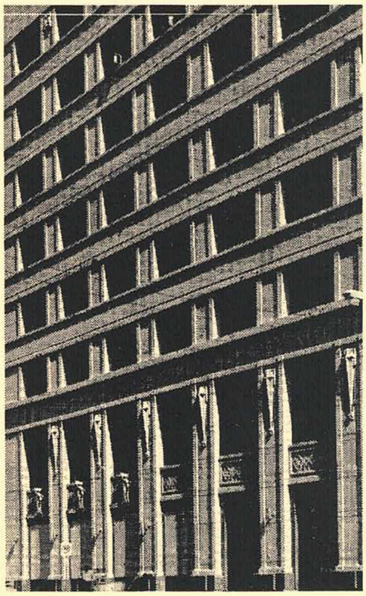
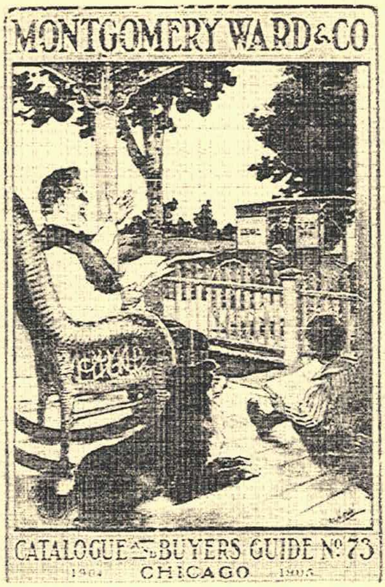
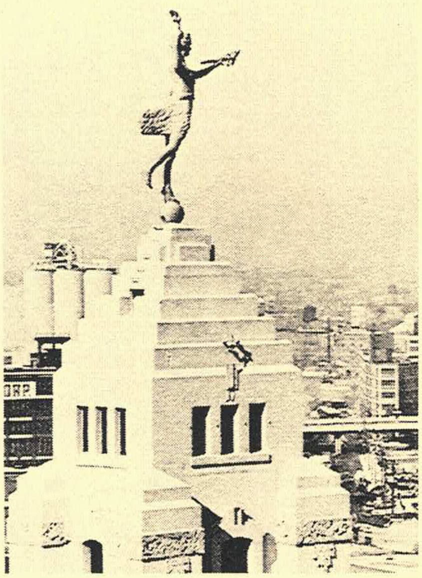
PRELIMINARY STAFF SUMMARY OF INFORMATION




MONTGOMERY WARD & CO
CATALOGUE AND BUYERS GUIDE No. 73
1904 CHICAGO 1905



Montgomery Ward & Co.

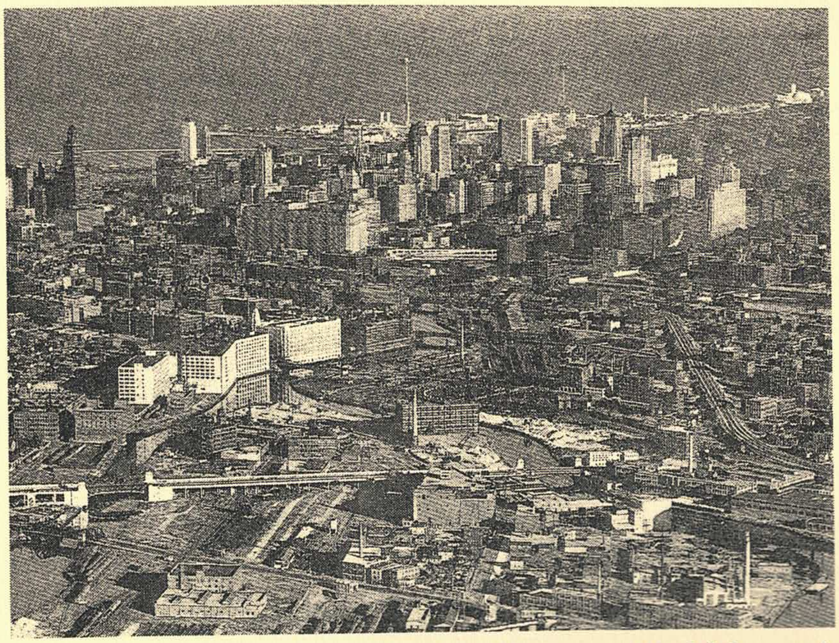
Catalog House and Administration Building

618 and 619-621 W. Chicago Ave.

Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks on December 3, 1997

CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Christopher R. Hill, Commissioner



ABOVE: The prominence of the newly painted Montgomery Ward & Co. complex (white-colored buildings, foreground) is obvious in this 1933 aerial photograph. The facility is located approximately one mile northwest of the Loop.

COVER: The south facade of the Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House building (left); the cover of a company mail order catalog from 1904-05 (middle); and the bronze statue atop the tower of the Administration Building (right).

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects, or entire districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.

The designation process begins with a staff study--summarized in this report--discussing the background and significance of the proposed landmark. The next step is a preliminary vote by the Landmarks Commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. This vote not only initiates the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until the landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.

This Preliminary Summary of Information is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within the actual designation ordinance approved by City Council should be regarded as final.

Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House and Administration Building

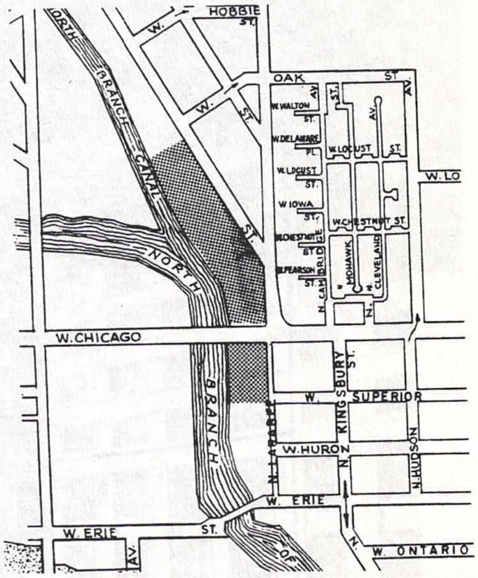
Catalog House: 600-618 W. Chicago Ave.,
722-830 N. Larrabee St., and 832-870 N. Kingsbury St.
Built 1907-08; Richard E. Schmidt, Garden & Martin, architect
Catalog House Additions: 872-934 N. Kingsbury St.
Built 1917, 1940, and 1970; Montgomery Ward & Co., architect
Administration Building: 601-619 W. Chicago Ave.
Built 1928-29; Montgomery Ward & Co., architect

The two major historic buildings in the Montgomery Ward & Co. complex on Chicago's Near North Side meet the criterion for Chicago Landmark status in the following ways:

- As the longtime headquarters of Montgomery Ward & Co., the Catalog House and Administration Building are linked to one of the major chapters in the history of American retailing: the mail order catalog business. They were listed as a National Historic Landmark in 1978.

- The Catalog House is identified with the life of one of the city's most prominent individuals, A. Montgomery Ward, a nationally known merchandising pioneer who also led a successful civic battle to save one of the city's great lakefront legacies, Grant Park, from commercial development.

- The Catalog House represents one of the nation's best industrial examples of the Chicago School, a style that was influential in the development of modern architecture. The fact that this style was used to design one of the nation's earliest and largest

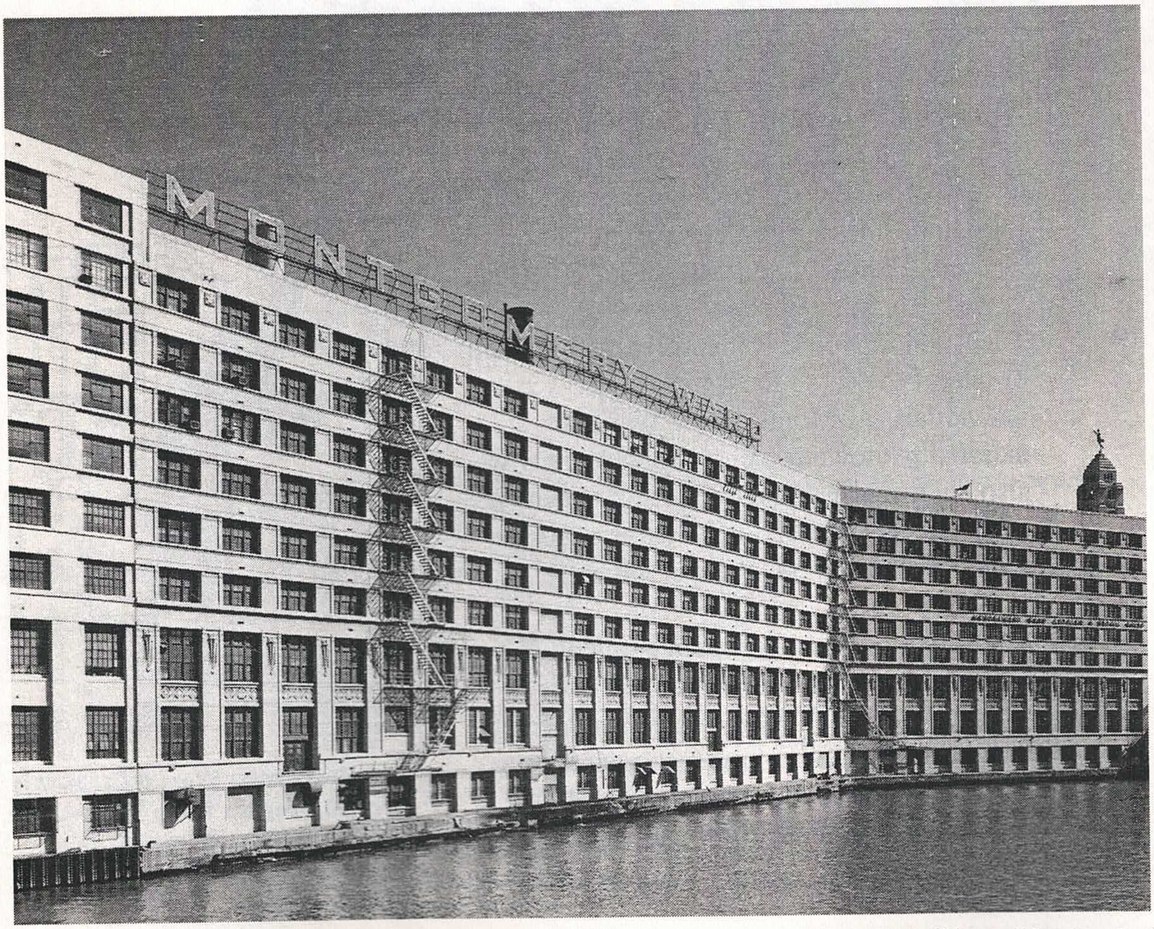

HOBBIE ST.
W.
NORTH BRANCH CANAL
W. ST.
OAK ST. AV.
W. WALTON
W. DELAWARE PL.
W. LOCUST ST.
W. LO
W. IOWA ST.
W. CHESTNUT ST.
N. CAMBRIDGE
MOHAWK
CLEVELAND
W. PEARSON ST.
NORTH
W. CHICAGO
BRANCH
N. LARRABEE
N. KINGSBURY ST.
W. SUPERIOR
W. HURON
N. HUDSON
W. ERIE
W. ERIE ST.
AV.
W. ONTARIO

The Montgomery Ward & Co. plant is located along the North Branch of the Chicago River, at Chicago Avenue.

examples of a reinforced concrete structure makes it an even rarer and more significant piece of world architectural history.

- The Catalog House was designed by Richard E. Schmidt, Garden & Martin, a prominent Chicago architectural firm whose work is regarded as nationally significant, both for its originality and for the design treatment it gave to new materials. The Catalog House is one of the firm's most influential works.

- Finally, the Montgomery Ward & Co. complex is one of the city's most well "established and familiar visual features." Its dramatic, curving form ranks as one of the most impressive visual images along the Chicago River, and the Administration Building's distinctive tower and sculpture can be seen for miles.



The Catalog House (above, in 1970) is one of the nation's finest industrial examples of the Chicago School style of architecture. The Administration Building (top) was built in 1928-29, two decades after the Catalog House.

The Company and its Founder

> He combined a Methodist minister's feeling for old-time, old-fashioned morality with a go-getting businessman's feeling for new methods and new markets.
>
> --Daniel J. Boorstein, *Chicago History* (Spring-Summer, 1973)

> He justly ranks as one of the nation's great merchants. His idea for directly selling by mail...ranks with the railroad, the automobile, and the airlines as one of the great unifying forces in the nation.
>
> --William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis* (1991)

Aaron Montgomery Ward (1843-1913) was born in Chatham, N.J., to parents of modest means. He obtained a rudimentary public school education in Niles, Mich., where his father operated a cobbler's shop. His early career included being a cobbler's apprentice as well as a laborer in a barrel factory and brickyard.

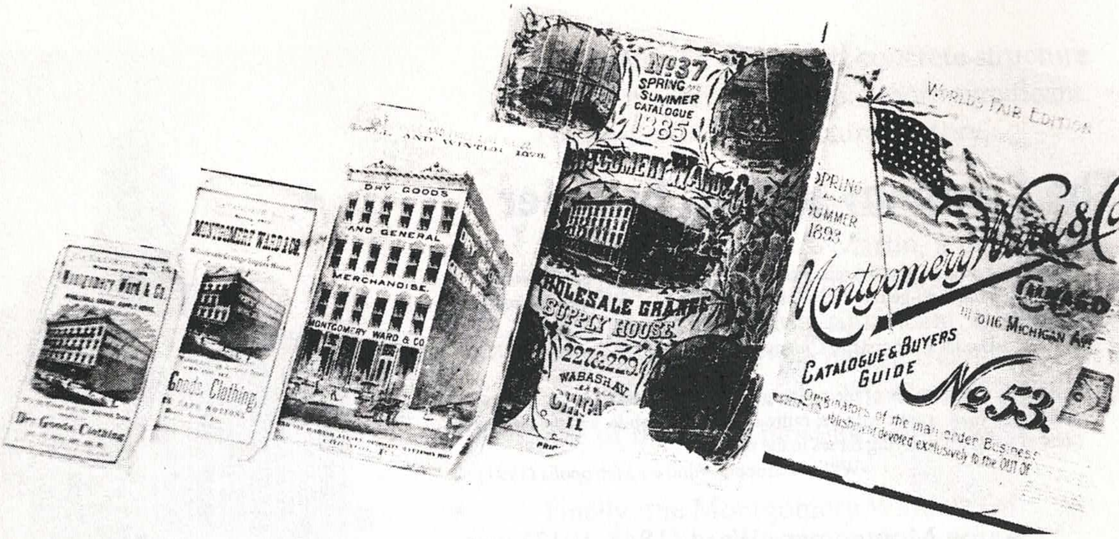
In 1862, Ward moved to St. Joseph, Mich., where he clerked in a general store. Although he became store manager within three years, he abandoned this position in 1866 and went to Chicago to seek his fortune. He started as a retail clerk for Field, Palmer and Leiter, before moving to St. Louis, where he marketed the products of a dry goods wholesaler to small country stores.

A. Montgomery Ward, at age 45

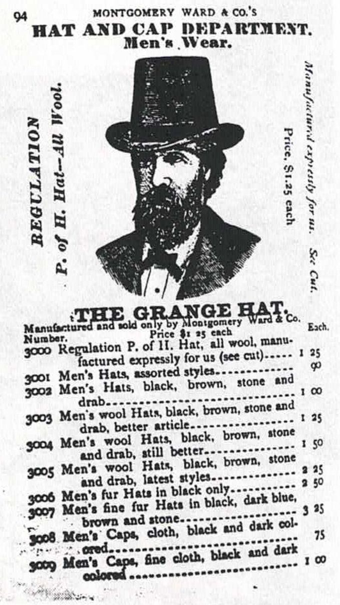
It was there, as a traveling salesman, that Ward obtained a first-hand knowledge of the retailing climate of rural America--as well as the wants and needs of the country consumer. According to historian Perry Duis:

> He noted their dependence on local merchants who extended credit as a means of retaining patrons....(He) also understood the nature of rural hostility to the city, where invisible commodity markets determined prices and railway barons set their exhorbitant rates. Ward realized that thousands of miles of railway extended out in all directions from Chicago. If he could travel hundreds of towns as a salesman, why not ship things there by rail.

Imbued with the idea of starting a mail-order company, Ward returned to Chicago, where he went to work for a merchant of dry goods, notions, and carpets. He and his brother-in-law, George Thorne, began to save money, accumulate merchandise, and despite the loss of their first inventory in the Fire of


Montgomery Ward & Co
Dry Goods Clothing
DRY GOODS
AND GENERAL
MERCHANDISE
MONTGOMERY WARD & CO
No 37
SPRING SUMMER
CATALOGUE
1885
MONTGOMERY WARD & CO
WHOLESALE GRANGE SUPPLY HOUSE
227 & 229
WABASH AV.
CHICAGO
ILL
WORLD'S FAIR EDITION
SPRING
SUMMER
1893
Montgomery Ward & Co.
CHICAGO
CATALOGUE & BUYERS GUIDE
No 53
Originators of the mail order Business

The core of the success of Montgomery Ward & Co. as a mail order business was its catalog. Above, the range of the company's early catalogs, from a 3½ x 5-inch version in 1876 to a 544-page book in 1893. Below, a page highlighting one of the company's early marketing successes, the Grange Hat.



94 MONTGOMERY WARD & CO.'S

HAT AND CAP DEPARTMENT.
Men's Wear.

REGULATION
P. of H. Hat—All Wool.

Price, $1.25 each

Manufactured expressly for us. See Cut.

THE GRANGE HAT.
Manufactured and sold only by Montgomery Ward & Co.
Price $1 25 each

Number.		Each.
3000	Regulation P. of H. Hat, all wool, manufactured expressly for us (see cut)	1 25
3001	Men's Hats, assorted styles	90
3002	Men's Hats, black, brown, stone and drab	1 00
3003	Men's wool Hats, black, brown, stone and drab, better article	1 25
3004	Men's wool Hats, black, brown, stone and drab, still better	1 50
3005	Men's wool Hats, black, brown, stone and drab, latest styles	2 25
3006	Men's fur Hats in black only	2 50
3007	Men's fine fur Hats in black, dark blue, brown and stone	3 25
3008	Men's Caps, cloth, black and dark colored	75
3009	Men's Caps, fine cloth, black and dark colored	1 00

1871--they opened a small office in August 1872 at 825 N. Clark St. (since demolished) The company's first mail-order catalog was a simple, one-page sheet that listed 163 items, all costing $1 or less.

The company received a boost when it formed a loose affiliation with the Patrons of Husbandry (better known as the Grange), a fraternal and lobbying organization designed to aid farmers. Wards' notions for direct-mail marketing closely paralleled the Grange's ideas for establishing rural cooperatives that would sell direct to the customer, avoiding the much-derided "middle man."

By 1874, Wards had sales of $100,000 and its first bound (24-page) catalog. A decade later, sales were over $1 million; the catalog had expanded to 540 pages. During these early years, the company moved frequently throughout the Loop--each building a larger space than the previous one. These locations included: 159 W. Hubbard, 246-254 W. Kinzie, and 228-230 S. Wabash (all since demolished).

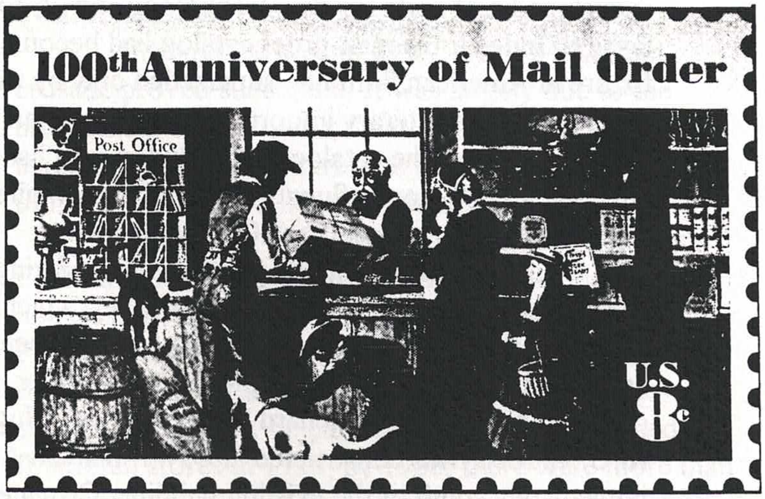
Initially, the low prices that the company advertised caused a great deal of skepticism. The *Chicago Tribune* warned readers that "only credulous fools, who place boundless faith in anything which is set up in type and printed" would patronize such "deadbeats." However, a month later, following an investigation, the paper recanted. Notes historian William Cronon, in *Nature's Metropolis*:

> How did Ward manage to offer such low prices? The *Tribune* explained to its readers that...like other wholesalers, he bought in large volume, getting the lowest possible prices for his purchases. By selling direct to the final customer, he could offer prices that included no retailer's markup. He avoided the costs of operating a store and had no sales force, thereby avoiding a retailer's rents and salaries. And the real proof that Ward was running a legitimate business, said the *Tribune,* was his guarantee. Customers who received their orders at the express office were entitled to open the package and examine its contents before paying. If they were dissatisfied for any reason, they could simply refuse payment....Ward's money-back guarantee was a new institutionalized basis for long-distance transactions, in which cash payments and direct inspection took the place of personal acquaintances and credit.

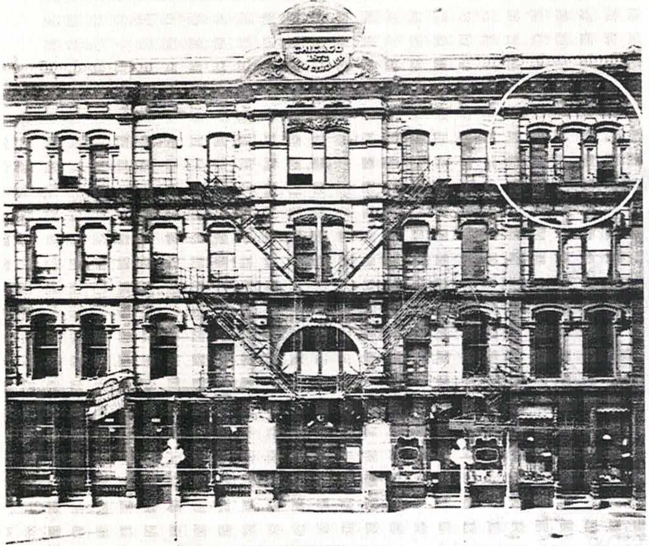
The Wish Book

The company's principal sales tool was the catalog, which competed with the one-on-one sales pitch of the country store proprietor. Fortunately for Ward, he was able to take advantage of various late-19th century advances in printing technologies, including color and photographic reproduction. This helped make the catalog more than just a glossy advertisement. Its precise and vivid descriptions and illustrations of products helped asssure customers that they would get exactly what they had ordered and paid for.

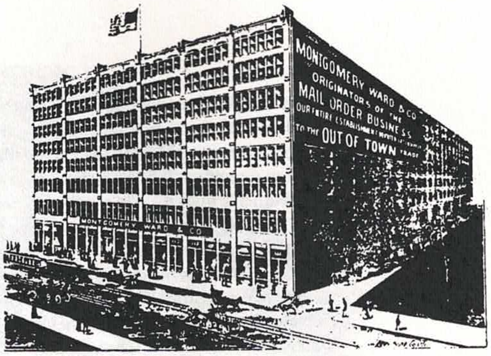
The mail order catalog--or "wish book," as it was referred to by rural children at Christmas-time, also unexpectedly fulfilled another need of the hinterland, as an instrument of education. With a scarcity of textbooks in country schoolhouses, it could be used to teach reading and spelling.

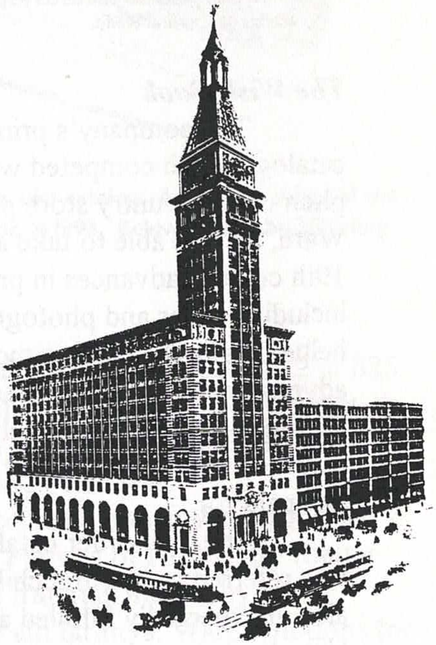

100th Anniversary of Mail Order
Post Office
U.S.
8c

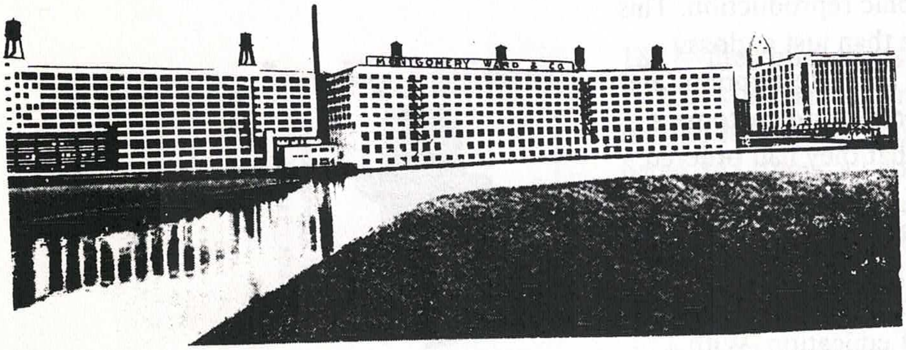
A U.S. postage stamp was issued in 1972 to commemorate the centennial of the founding of Montgomery Ward & Co.



The company's rapid growth can be traced by its early moves, including (clockwise, from left): its first office on an upper floor at 825 N. Clark St. (1872-74); an entire warehouse at 20 N. Michigan Ave. (1888-1908); a new highrise at 6 N. Michigan Ave. (1898-1908); and the Chicago Avenue plant (1908-present).


MONTGOMERY WARD & CO.
ORIGINATORS OF THE
MAIL ORDER BUSINESS
OUR ENTIRE ESTABLISHMENT DEVOTED
TO THE OUT OF TOWN TRADE
MONTGOMERY WARD & CO.




MONTGOMERY WARD & CO.

Arithmetic could be learned by filling out orders and adding up items; geography lessons could be culled from the catalog's postal zone maps; and it became an encyclopedia of sorts for new technology and up-to-date fashion. Indeed, the mail-order catalog had become a fixture in American farm life, superseded only by the Bible in terms of literary importance to an agrarian society. In 1946, the catalog was included on a list of America's "100 most influential books," as compiled by the Grolier Club, a New York City book society.

In 1888, the company purchased an existing warehouse building at 20 N. Michigan Ave., which it soon expanded to meet the firm's fast-growing needs for additional space. In 1898, a high-rise office tower, designed by architects Richard E. Schmidt and Hugh M.G. Garden, was constructed at 6 N. Michigan Ave., immediately south of the existing building. Crowned by what was then the highest tower in the city, its observation deck became a popular tourist attraction.

The two buildings were nicknamed the "Busy Bee Hive," in recognition of their dual purpose as the company's administrative headquarters and catalog warehouse. (Both buildings still survive, as part of the line of historic buildings facing Grant Park. The tower, however, was removed in 1947.)

In the 1890s, Sears, Roebuck and Company began competing directly with Wards as a mail-order house. By 1900, the two companies were considered the world's largest merchandising organizations. Despite Wards' new location on Michigan Avenue, the Loop location proved too constraining to its booming operations--both to further expansion and for shipping and deliveries.

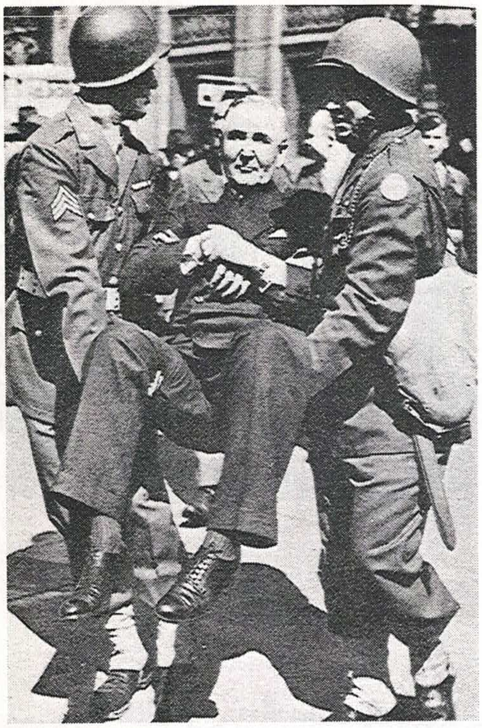
In 1906, the company purchased a site along the east bank of the North Branch of the Chicago River, a predominantly industrial neighborhood that was readily accessible both to water and railroad lines. For the design of this new headquarters and mail order building, Wards again turned to architects Schmidt and Garden (see page 9).

Watchdog of the Lakefront

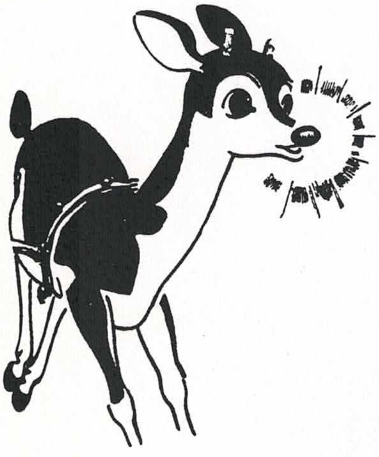
Around this same time, the company's founder began to take a less active role in the firm's operations. Ward spent most of his later years spearheading a campaign to protect the city's lakefront from commercial development. His interest has grown from the changes he had begun to witness from his window in the company's old headquarters, overlooking Lake Michigan.

Although he died in 1913, Ward's lakefront crusade proved successful. It was largely due to the unremitting efforts of this "watchdog of the lakefront" that Grant Park was created and ultimately protected from development.

Meanwhile, the company continued to flourish. Early in the 20th century, it opened branch mail order houses in Brooklyn, Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Portland. As U.S. population continued to shift from rural to urban areas, however, the company's sales strategies gradually began to change. Wards opened its first retail stores in 1925; by 1928, there were more than 200 retail outlets--mostly in small towns and mid-sized cities. (In 1929, the company built a new headquarters



Two indelible cultural images are linked to Montgomery Ward's Chicago Avenue plant. "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" was created here, in 1939, by the company's advertising department. Five years later, the company made national news when its president was forcibly carried out of the building during a union strike (note the Catalog House, background).

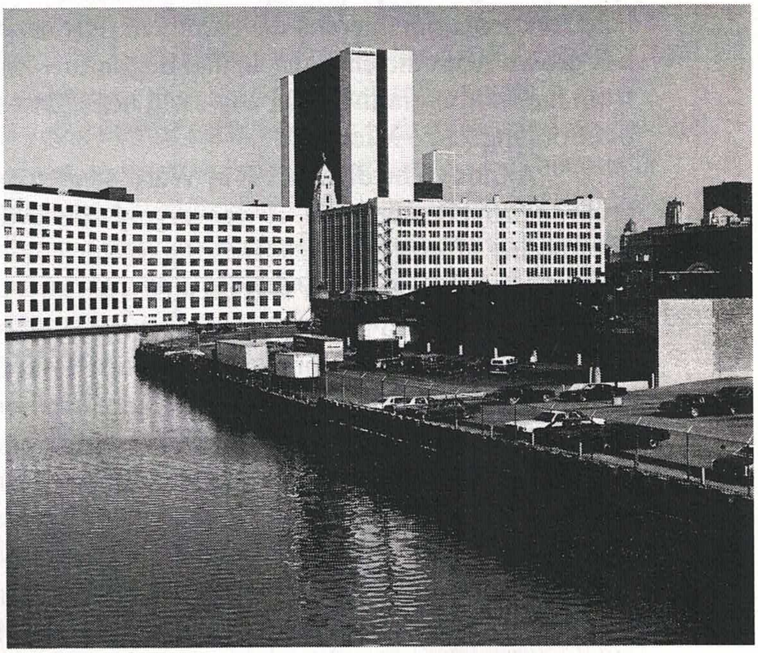


building, south of the Catalog House.)

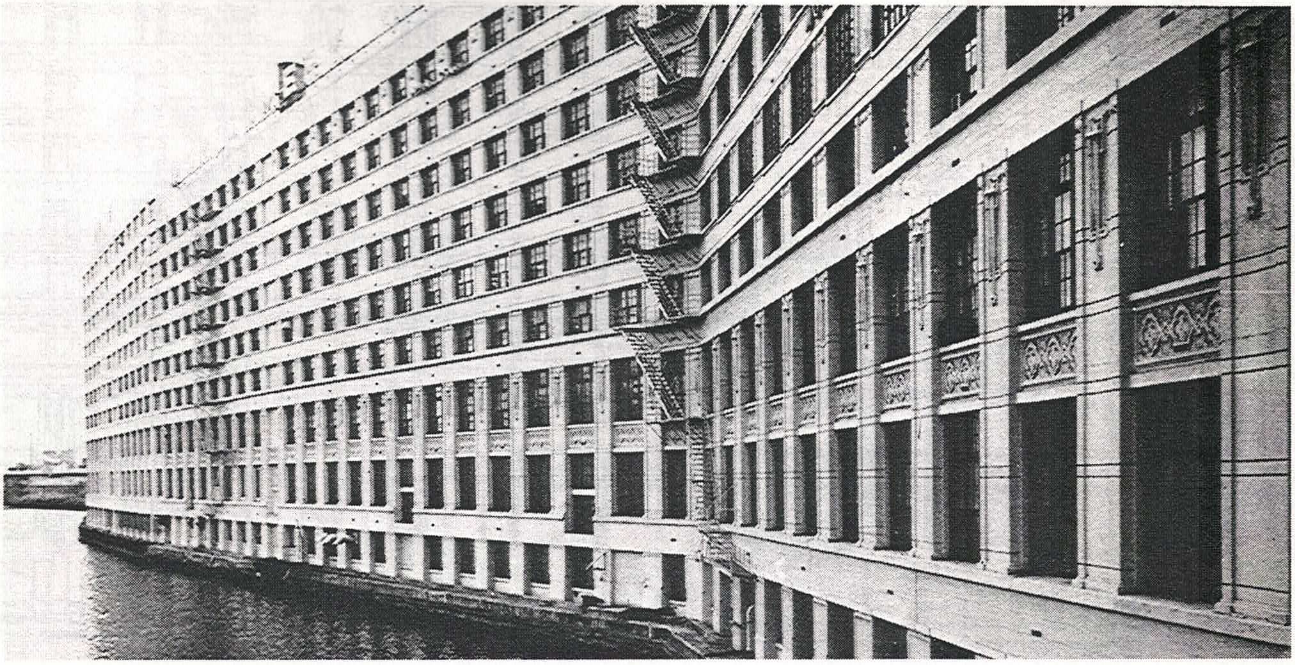
The company continued to promote its mail order catalog. For example, as part of the 1939 Christmas catalog, Wards gave away two million copies of a short story that had been written by one of its advertising copywriters, featuring a character named Rudolph (originally "Rollo" or "Reginald") the Red-Nosed Reindeer. The character gained even more popularity following World War II, when cowboy-singer Gene Autry released a song of the same title.

The Catalog House and Administrative Building also were the scene of a major union strike during World War II. The plant's shutdown subsequently resulted in a order by President Franklin D. Roosevelt for the federal government to take over operation of the company "as an essential element in the war effort." The news photograph of two Army officers carrying company president Sewell Avery out of the building remains one of history's most memorable strike images.

Wards continued to expand and retrofit its retail stores following World War II, while maintaining its principal administration center at the Chicago Avenue Bridge site. A major expansion of the corporate headquarters took place in 1974, when a 27-story office building and lower-level parking garage (Minoru Yamasaki, architect) were constructed, directly east of the Administration Building and Catalog House.

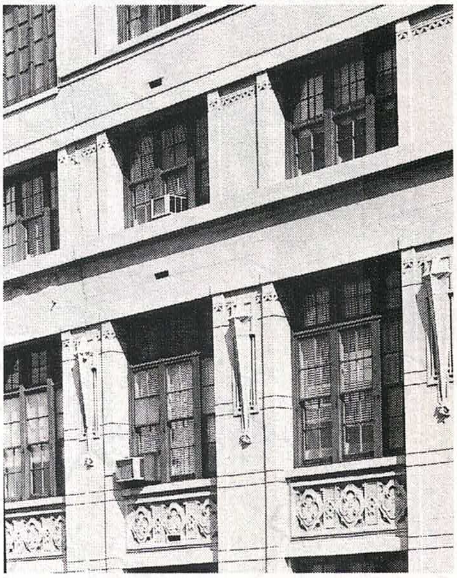


The high-rise corporate office tower (center) was added to the Montgomery Ward & Co. complex in 1974.



The unique contours of the Catalog House relate to a bend in the Chicago River. Below, a detail of the lower levels.

The Architecture of the Catalog House



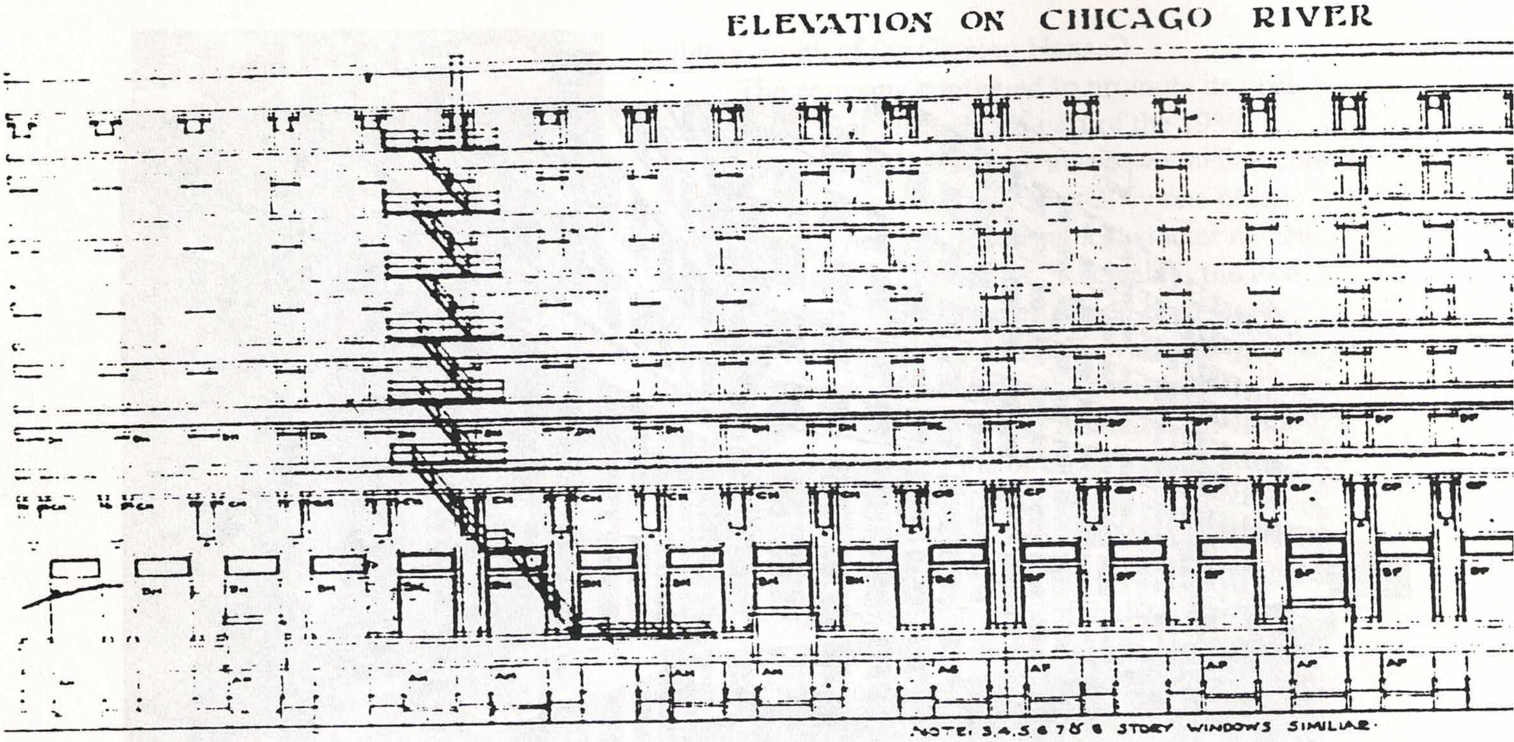
> It states the facts with perfect candor; of repetition and order it makes rhythm; from monotony it draws repose....The handling of different materials has been the basis for the invention of new forms.
> --William Herbert, *Architectural Record* (1908)

> One of the few late buildings in which the spirit of the Chicago School still survives.
> --Siegfrid Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941)

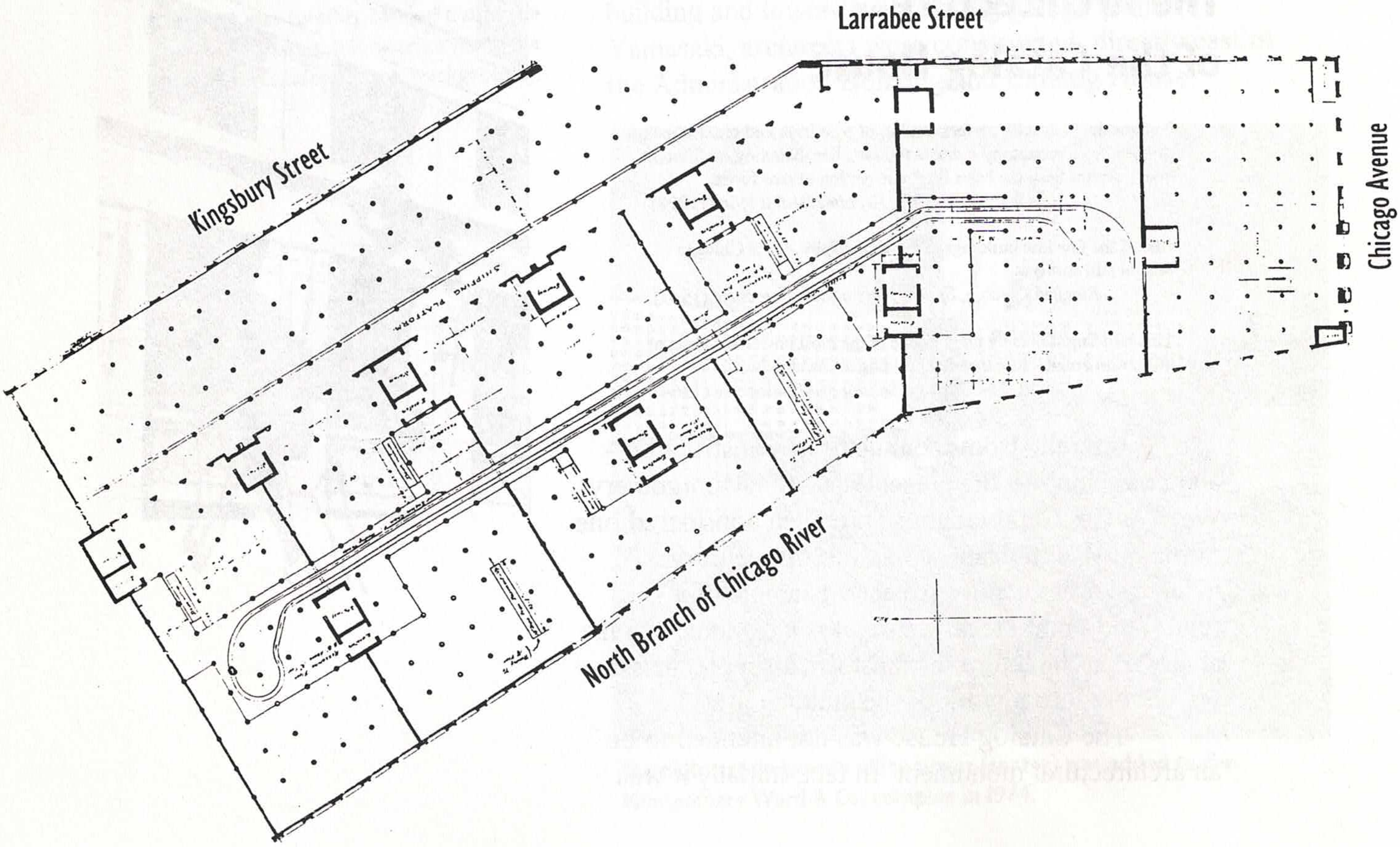
> This building stands by itself as one of the most powerful works of utilitarian architecture that our building art has produced.
> --Carl Condit, *The Chicago School of Architecture* (1964)

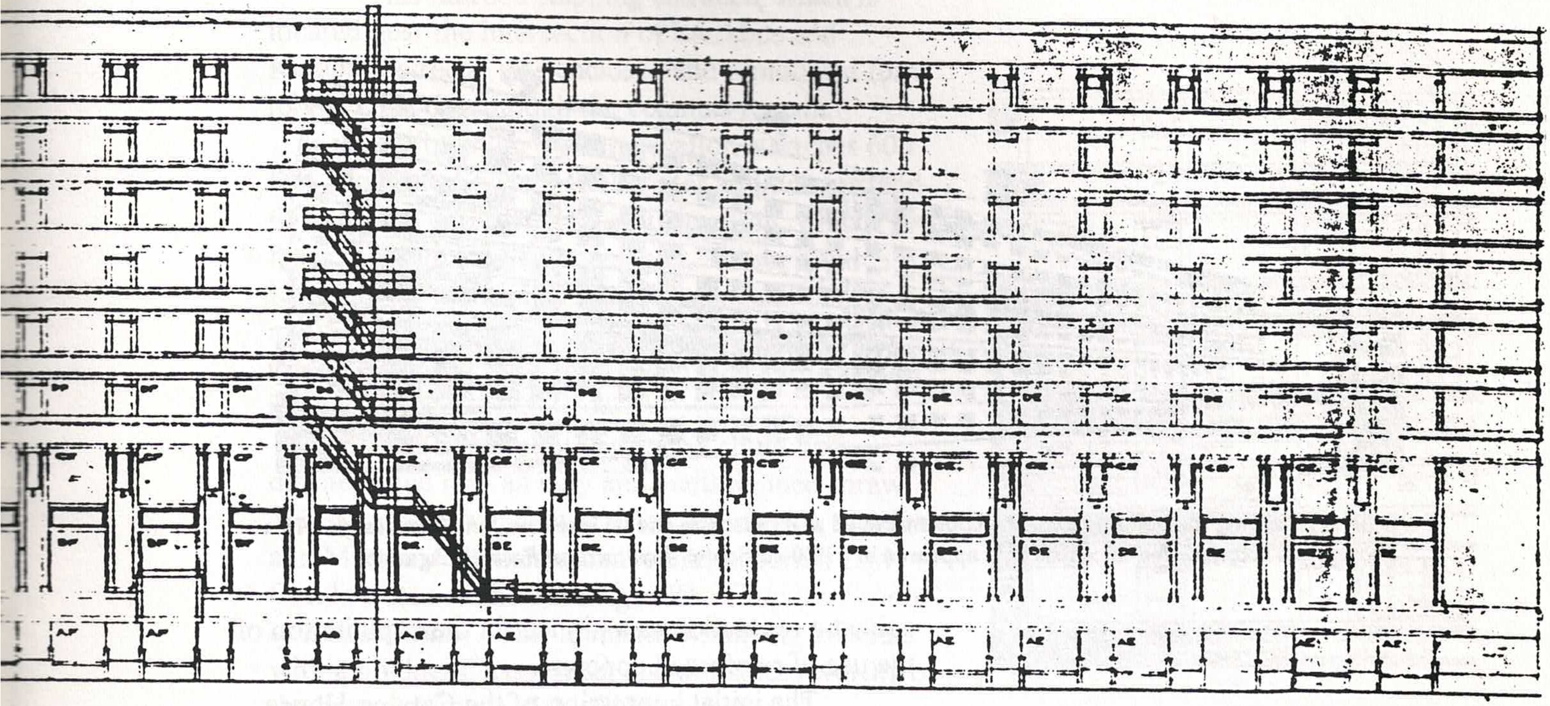
Literally from the time of its construction--and continuing to the present day--the Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House has been considered one of the most significant works of 20th-century industrial architecture. An early example of a reinforced-concrete structure, it is a testament to the ability of architecture to transform a simple, massive warehouse into a work of the building art.

The Catalog House was not intended to be an architectural monument. In fact, initially it was


ELEVATION ON CHICAGO RIVER
NOTE: 3,4,5,6,7 & 8 STOREY WINDOWS SIMILIAR

At the time of its construction, Montgomery Ward's Catalog House was one of the world's largest buildings. It stretched two city blocks--more than two football fields in length. Miles of conveyor belts (see 1915 photograph, at right) circulated through 1.25 million square feet of office and warehouse space. An enclosed shipping platform facing Kingsbury Street (below, top) sheltered as many as two dozen railroad freight cars at the same time.


Larrabee Street
Kingsbury Street
SHIPPING PLATFORM
Chicago Avenue
North Branch of Chicago River

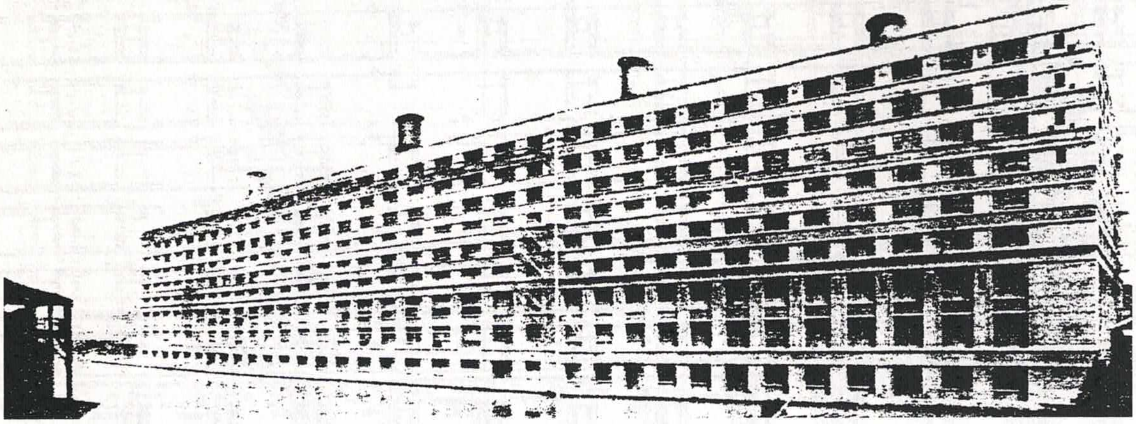


lauded as an outstanding technical achievement, as it was built entirely of reinforced concrete, a fairly new building material that had been primarily used in Europe. In fact, although it proved extremely economical, many construction experts were skeptical of its use in buildings. An editorial in the *Engineering News-Record* of June 1903, entitled "The Concrete Danger," warned:

> We have yet to see any system of concrete floor or column construction which in our judgement is fit to be trusted in any building.

Because a building frame of reinforced concrete had not been used before in Chicago, Richard Schmidt and his partners, Hugh Garden and Edgar Martin, relied on German technical publications in calculating the loads that would be carried in the new structure. The octagonal-shaped columns are constructed of iron spiral hooping set within the concrete. The frame rests on 40- to 50-foot deep wood piles with concrete caps.

When completed, the Montgomery Ward Catalog House was one of the world's largest buildings--and the largest with a reinforced concrete frame. As a result of this accomplishment, as well as other buildings that soon followed, Chicago



Articles regarding the building's construction marveled at its vast size and its inventive "modern design." This photograph accompanied an article that appeared in a 1910 edition of *Architectural Record* magazine.

gained a reputation as a pioneer in the exploitation of the use of reinforced concrete.

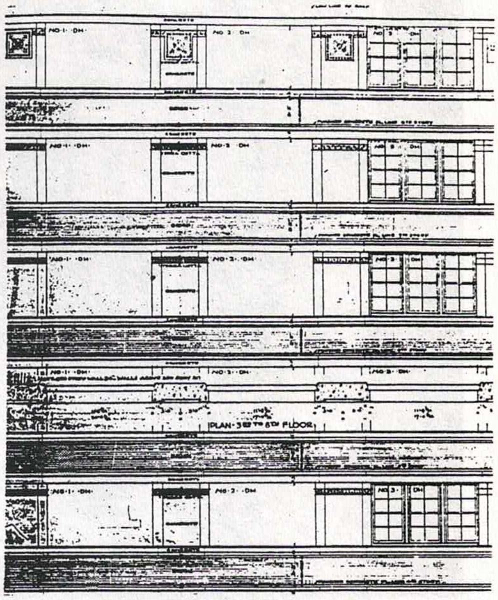
The initial impression of the Catalog House, both then and now, is simply its vastness. As Peter B. Wight, a well-known architectural critic, wrote in a February 1910 *Architectural Record* article, entitled "Utilitarian Architecture at Chicago:"

> Its enormous length, about the same as that of the U.S. Capitol, has not been concealed by any device in designing it, but has rather been intensified....Naturally, its owners were filled with pride at the satisfaction of having a longer building than anyone else, and did not mind if it were stretched a little.

Like its predecessor, the Sears, Roebuck and Company complex (built 1905-06) on the city's West Side, the immense size of Ward's Catalog House was dictated by the economics and practicalities of operating a complex and mammoth mail order business. The footprint of the original, "bent-trapezoidal" shaped Catalog House was more than three acres in size (containing 1.25 million square feet); the building's later additions total another three acres.

The original Catalog House, for instance, featured miles of conveyor belts circulating between various departments. The building also included a 450-foot-long, *interior* shipping platform that could accommodate 24 railroad freight cars. Window openings above this section are slightly wider (four windows each), due to the wider column spacing to accommodate the railroad boxcars.

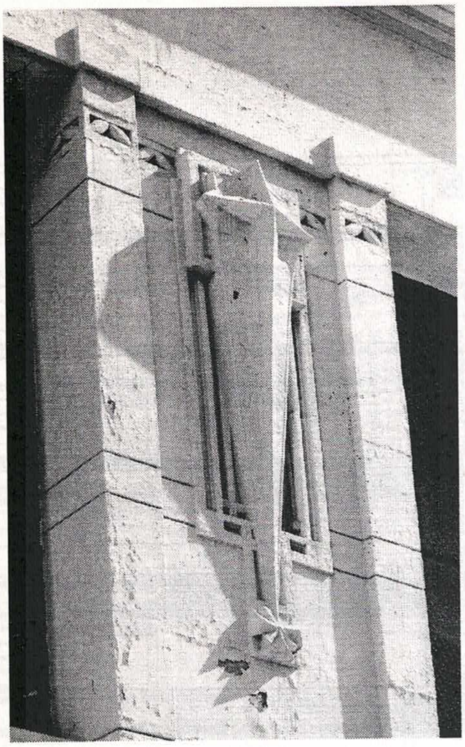
This railroad shipping entrance, which is located near the intersection of Larrabee and Kingbury streets, was enclosed and remodeled for a lobby, c.1975, although the columns remain.



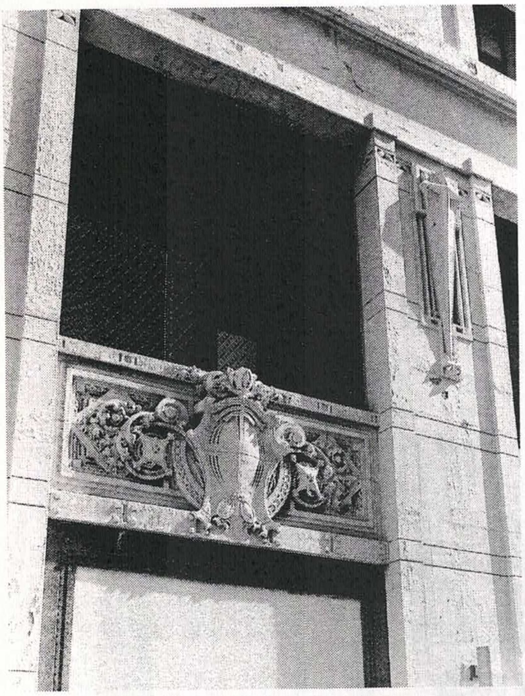
The building's west elevation stretches 600 feet along the Chicago River; later additions extend this another 480 feet. The east elevation, which faces railroad right-of-way along Larrabee and Kingsbury streets, is 730 feet long; again, the additions lengthen it by 480 feet. In contrast, the building's south elevation (facing Chicago Avenue) is only 150 feet wide.

Such a mammoth structure could have disintegrated into an ugly and undisciplined sprawl in less capable hands than those of Schmidt, Garden and Martin. As famed architectural historian Carl Condit noted of the building in *The Chicago School of Architecture*: "This immense volume is treated with a boldness, assurance, and directness worthy of the best architects of the Chicago School."

(The term "Chicago School" is used to designate those Chicago architects who were responsible, during the late-19th and early-20th centuries, for creating an original approach to



The two-story lower level of the Catalog House features a wealth of terra cotta ornament, including elongated chevrons (top) and other distinctive "Gardenesque-style" designs (below, above one of the former entrance doors facing Chicago Avenue).



commercial architecture that influenced the course of modern architecture. Among the architects commonly associated with the style are George Elmslie; Holabird & Roche; George Maher; Dwight Perkins; Louis Sullivan; Frank Lloyd Wright; and Schmidt, Garden and Martin.)

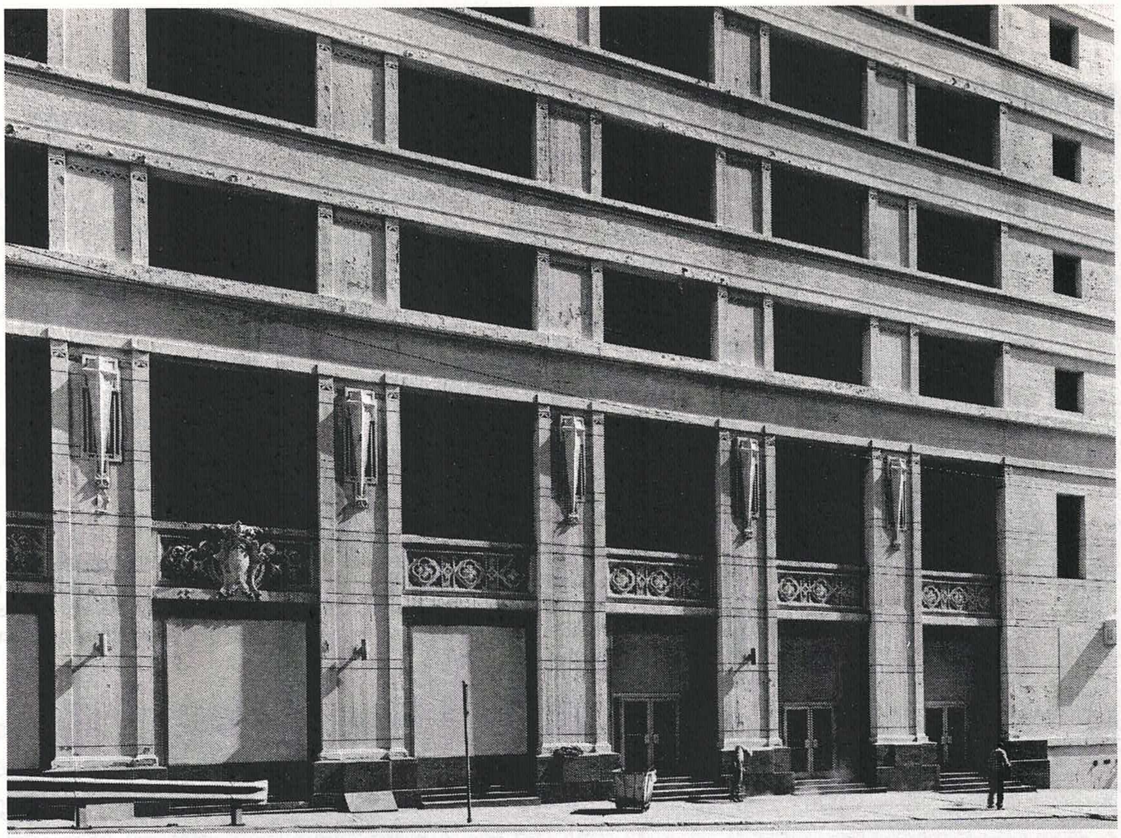
In the case of the Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House, the architects chose to emphasize the building's immense length by accentuating its horizontality. Between the long rows of windows, they located continuous "spandrels" (horizontal wall areas) that extend the length of the building, without interruption.

Faced with red brick (now painted a cream color), these spandrels created bands that contrasted dramatically with the natural gray finish of the concrete piers and frame. At the tops and bottoms of the spandrels are narrow projecting bands of concrete that further exaggerated the building's horizontality, especially when they cast stark shadows in direct sunlight.

Although the brick spandrels remain, the off-white colored paint that has covered the red brick since 1929 (when the Administration Building was constructed) has made the banding effect less noticeable than it appears in early photographs of the building. "Details are lost in the monochromatic palette," notes *The AIA Guide to Chicago*, "but their quality and skillfully spare usage reward close examination." A simple cleaning of the building would restore this dramatic effect and details.

The exterior design is an outstanding example of the "form follows function" design dictum that has been attributed to architect Louis Sullivan. "Never had the Chicago School achieved so direct an expression of structure," writes H. Allen Brooks in *The Prairie School* (1972). "One actually sees the load-bearing structure itself."

Natural light for work in such an enormous building was essential, and it was a matter of course that broad bands of horizontal windows--deeply recessed in the window openings--should be used. Just how these rows of windows were arranged provides an indication of the structure's functions. The first two floors, for instance, were devoted to the basic operations of the business (i.e., shipping and

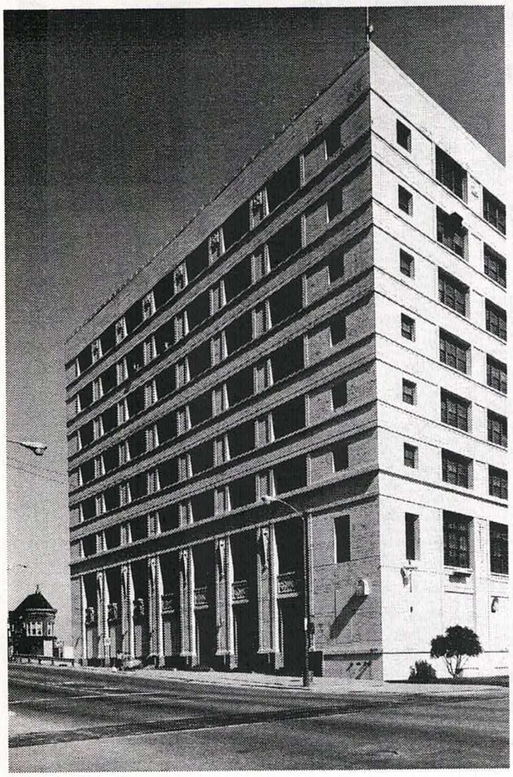


The broad windows of the Catalog House are deeply recessed between concrete vertical piers and continuous horizontal spandrels, creating a dramatic interplay of light and shadow. This view of the Chicago Avenue facade was taken in 1984.

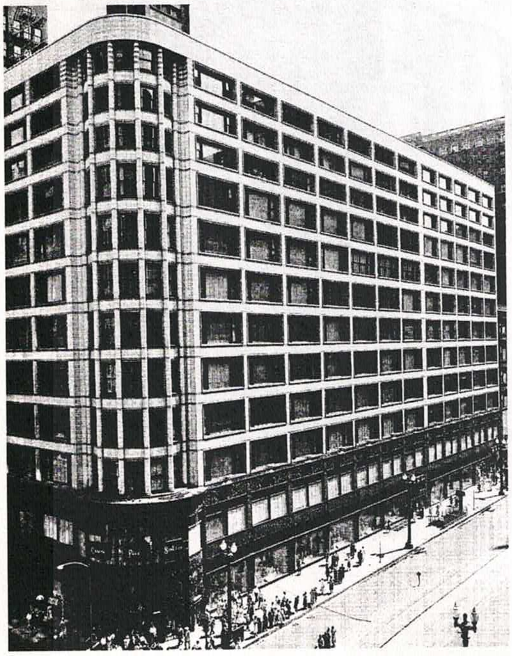
administration), while the upper floors were devoted to storage. An additional story on the river side provided access to water-level shipping.

On the lower floors, the projecting concrete piers of the building are two stories in height, with the spandrels recessed behind them in order to emphasize the height of the base. The greatest amount of decorative details are focused in this area. Projecting, elongated-shaped chevron motifs top each pier, along with subtle details that emphasize the "capitals" in a manner quite fitting for an industrial building. More distinctive ornament, characteristic of architect Hugh Garden's "Gardenesque-style" designs, fills the spandrel areas between the piers on the south and west elevations.

The spandrel ornament over the original three main doorways facing Chicago Avenue are slightly more elaborate, featuring shields reminiscent of a Louis Sullivan-style design. (All of these details were fabricated of a red-colored terra cotta. However, as with the rest of the building, they were painted a uniform cream color around 1930.)



The Catalog House (above) is considered as important to modern industrial architecture as the Carson Pirie Scott department store (below) is to modern commercial architecture. Both feature bold ribbon windows, gridlike structural frames, distinctive lower-level ornament, and large unsubdivided interior spaces.



The building's ground level facing Chicago Avenue is given further emphasis through the use of granite and terra cotta details surrounding its windows and doorways. In addition, the concrete on the lower two levels--and on all of the elevations--is "scored" with thin horizontal lines, in an effort to break up its vertical mass into smaller elements.

This design treatment of a then-new building material (reinforced concrete) was particularly innnovative, as was noted in an early review in a 1908 issue of *Architectural Record*:

> The new building...is a good example of the demands made upon the resourcefulness of the modern architect....It is apparent that in a new type of building and with new materials...no adaptation of the old forms of architecture can have any meaning if we care anything for truth in the expression of function and structure.

On the building's upper six stories, the emphasis is reversed. Here, the piers are set behind the spandrels and both are unrelieved by any ornament, as befitting an area devoted to only storage space. Instead of a projecting cornice, the building is topped by a thin band of ornament and the piers, themselves are capped by subtle, rosette-like, "Gardenesque" designs.

The parallels between the design of Louis Sullivan's famed Carson Pirie Scott & Co. Building (1 S. State St.; 1898) and Schmidt, Garden and Martin's design for the Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House are striking. Notes architectural historian Carl Condit, in his groundbreaking book on the Chicago School:

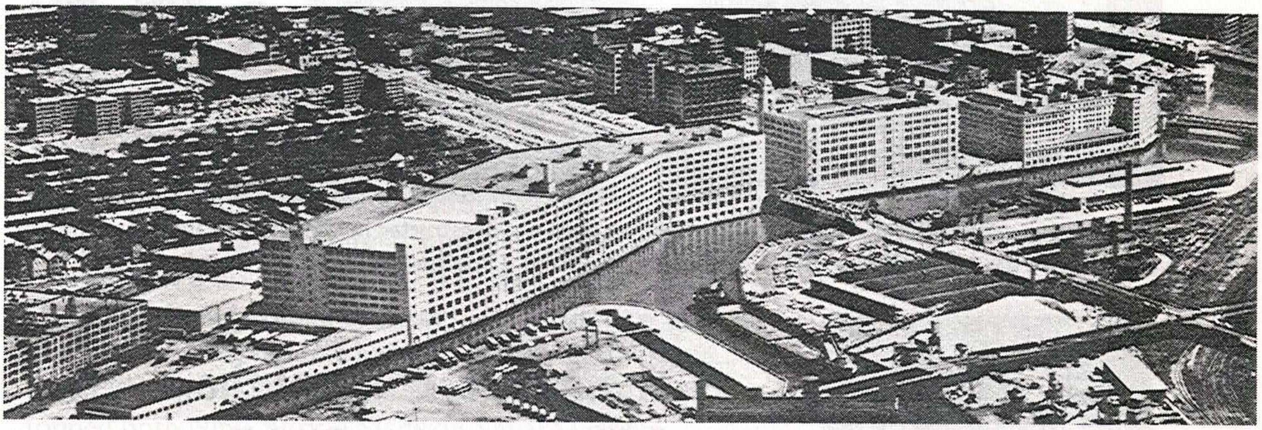
> Both represent a complete integration of the (style's) two fundamental themes...they take their basic form from their system of construction, but they are at the same time revelations of purely personal ideas.

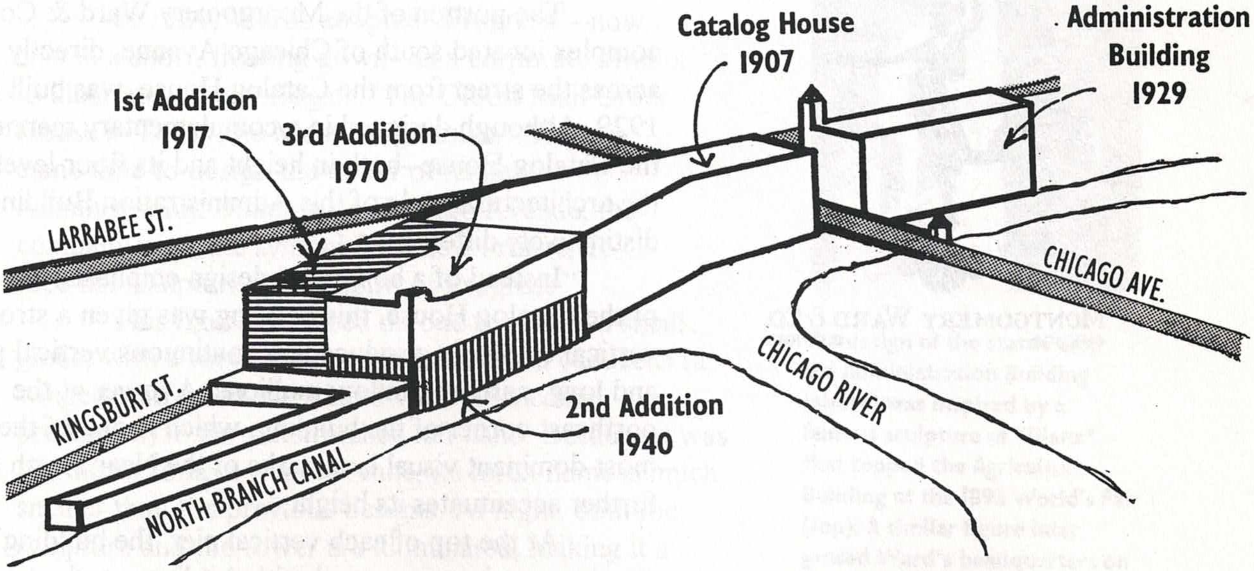
In order to accommodate the rapid growth of Montgomery Ward & Co., the Catalog House has been added on to several times, almost from the beginning and, as it turned out, its design lended itself, quite easily, to building expansion.

In 1917, the northeast portion of the building, which contained the railroad shipping area, was expanded with an eight-story addition that stretched 480 feet along the Kingsbury street railroad right-of-way. The design of this addition matches the floor heights of the original building, although the casement-style windows are larger and taller than those in the Catalog House and its ornamentation is much simpler.

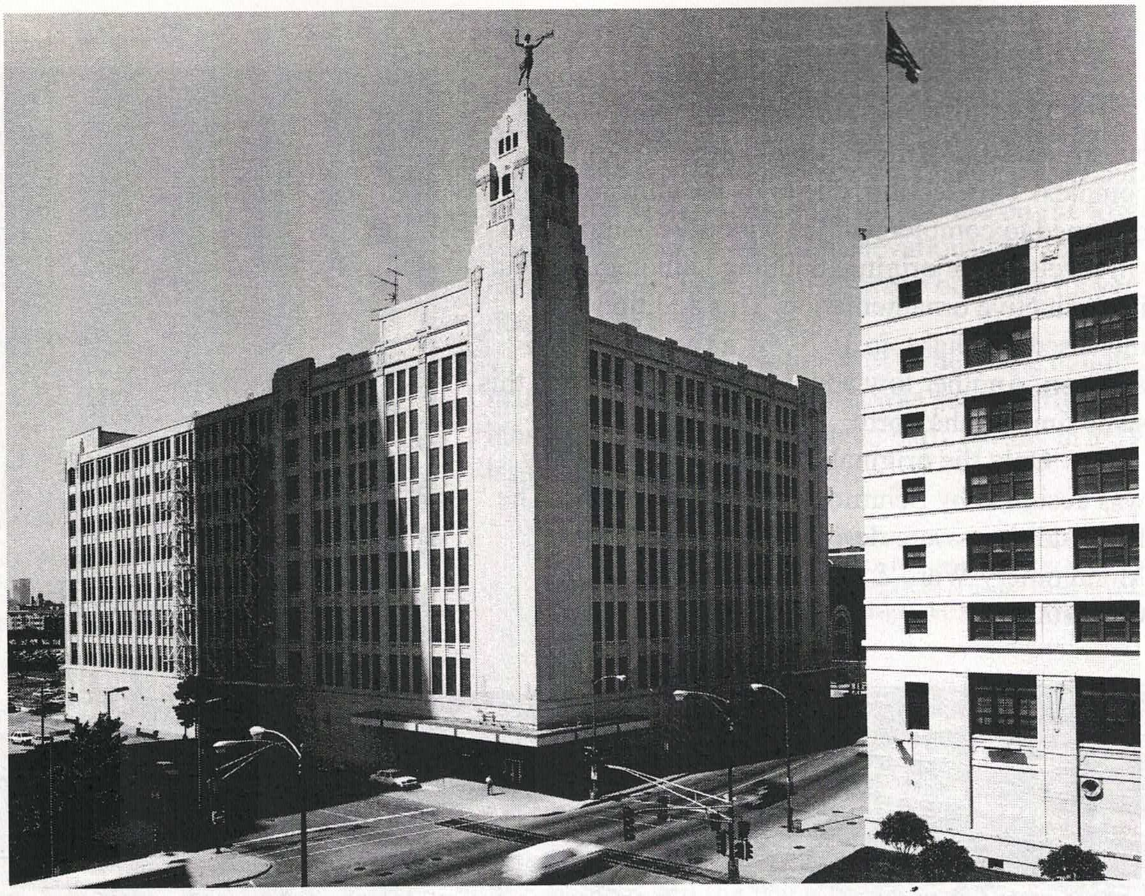
In 1940, a five-story addition was constructed along the Chicago River side of the complex. This section, due to its prominence, was designed to complement the window openings and sill levels of the original building, although without its distinctive ornamentation. This addition was increased in height, in 1970, by a five-story addition. Another low addition was built around this same time, to the north.

Only the original Catalog House building was designed by Schmidt, Garden and Martin. The later additions were designed, in house, by the Montgomery Ward & Co. Department of Construction.

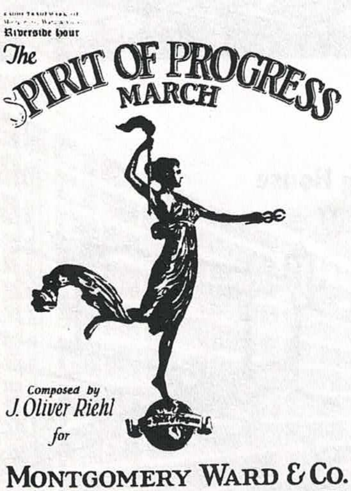



Catalog House
1907
Administration
Building
1929
Ist Addition
1917
3rd Addition
1970
LARRABEE ST.
CHICAGO AVE.
CHICAGO RIVER
KINGSBURY ST.
2nd Addition
1940
NORTH BRANCH CANAL

The Catalog House has been added on to several times since it was built in 1907-08. The view shown in the drawing and photograph is looking east, across the Chicago River.



The Montgomery Ward & Co. Administration Building (left) was constructed in 1928-29, directly across Chicago Avenue from the Catalog House (right). The famed statue was a longtime symbol of the company (below).



The Architecture of the Administration Building

The portion of the Montgomery Ward & Co. complex located south of Chicago Avenue, directly across the street from the Catalog House, was built in 1929. Although designed in a complementary manner to the Catalog House--both in height and its floor levels--the architectural style of this Administration Building is distinctively different.

Instead of a horizontal design emphasis, like that of the Catalog House, this building was given a strongly vertical emphasis, produced by continuous vertical piers and long, narrow window mullions. A tower at the northeast corner of the building, which is one of the most dominant visual landmarks of the Near North Side, further accentuates its height.

At the top of each vertical pier, the building's cornice area is ornamented with Art Deco-style details. These designs are repeated, but with a more elongated motif, at the top of the building's corner piers and on the tower itself. The slender, four-story-tall tower was given further vertical emphasis by the lack of windows and continuous vertical concrete banding.

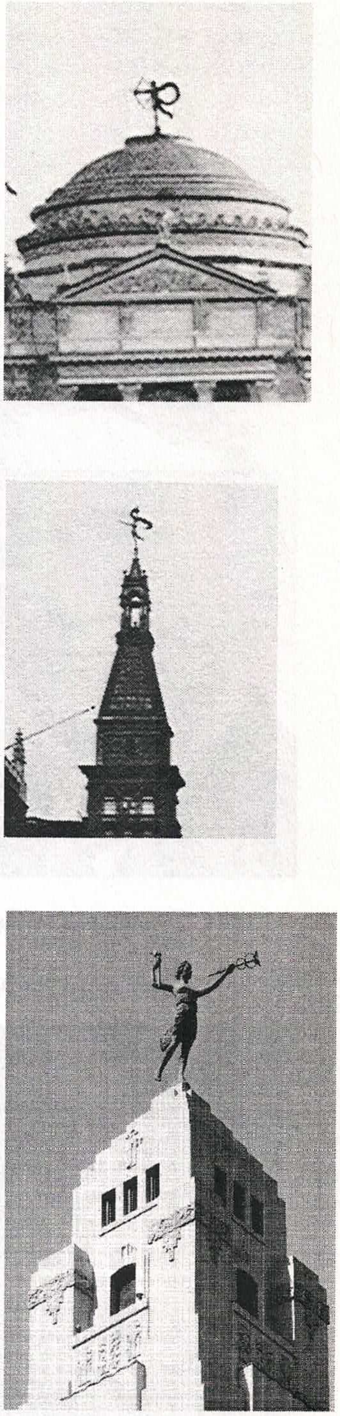
The design of the tower is strongly reminiscent of other building towers from the 1920s and early 1930s. Towers with setbacks had been encouraged by new city zoning ordinances that established maximum building heights, but permitted taller towers if they were set back from the mass of the building. Similar tower designs can be found throughout the country on department stores, public buildings, university bell towers, and movie theaters of the period.

The use of a tower, no doubt, was influenced by the design of the company's former headquarters at 6 N. Michigan Ave. (built 1897-98), which sported a landmark tower that subsequently became a symbol of Montgomery Ward & Co.

Each tower was given further prominence by the statuary placed atop them. In the case of the Michigan Avenue building, it was an 22-foot-tall gilded weather vane: A largely nude female figure entitled "Progress Lighting the Way for Commerce" (1900; J. Massey Rhind, sculptor). This sculpture is said to have been modeled after a copper weather vane ("Diana" by Augustus Saint-Gaudens) that had topped both New York's Madison Square Garden and the Agriculture Building at Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition of 1893.

In 1920, Wards adopted "Progress"--now clad in a short, flowing gown--as a corporate symbol to illustrate its new slogan: "The Oldest Mail Order House is Today the Most Progressive." When it came time to design the tower of its new Administration Building on Chicago Avenue, the company used the symbol for a new bronze, 16-foot-tall sculpture, "The Spirit of Progress."

This figure is poised on one foot atop a small globe, with a torch in her right hand and a caduceus (a winged staff often associated with the medical profession) in her outstretched left hand. Because it was not meant to be a weather vane, its torch flame is much smaller than the previous designs. At night, both the sculpture and the tower are illuminated, making it a visible landmark for miles in any direction.



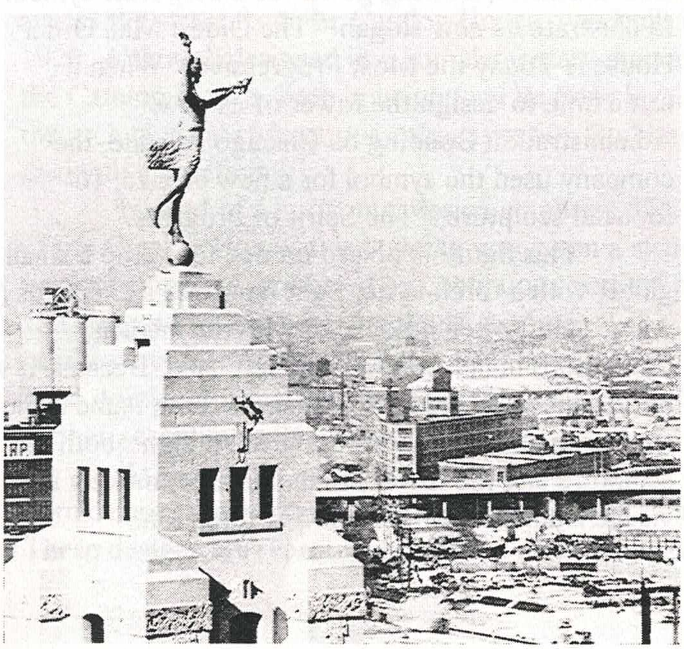
The design of the statue atop the Administration Building (above) was inspired by a famous sculpture of "Diana" that topped the Agriculture Building at the 1893 World's Fair (top). A similar figure later graced Ward's headquarters on Michigan Avenue (middle).

According to *A Guide to Chicago's Public Sculpture*, the likely sculptor was Joseph Conradi, who had done sculptural work on a number of Chicago buildings of the period, including St. Alphonsus Church at Lincoln and Southport avenues. (The sculpture atop the Michigan Avenue building apparently was sold for scrap when the tower was removed in 1947.)

The Administration Building, itself, was designed by Montgomery Ward's Department of Construction, which was responsible for most of the company's retail stores and catalog houses in the early-20th century. The architect listed on the building permit is William E. McCaully. Architect Frank E. Poschenreiter and structural engineer S. E. Berkenbilt also were part of the design team.

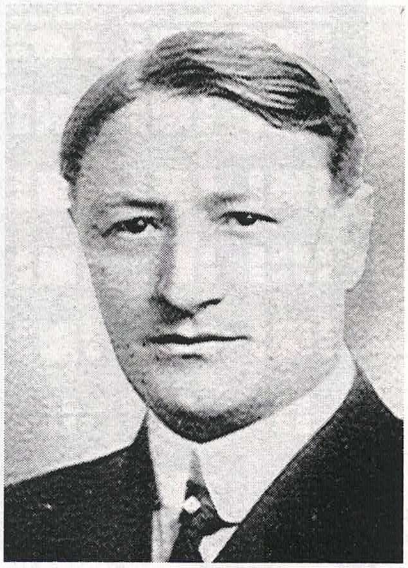
Another notable feature of the Administration Building is the 55-foot-wide, tentlike roof spanning its 8th-floor auditorium space. Also, since its inception, the building has been painted an off-white color. Apparently, the Catalog House was painted at the same time in order to unify the two structures. The two buildings also were connected, physically, by a tunnel that ran beneath Chicago Avenue.

A retail outlet originally occupied the first two floors and basement of the Administration Building, taking the place of an outlet that formerly was located in the Catalog House. The Administration Building's retail store later was replaced by offices, and the north and east faces of these ground levels were sheathed with red marble in 1974. The building's windows also were changed sometime during the 1980s.



The tower of the Administration Building, including its 16-foot bronze sculpture, is one of the most distinctive visual landmarks on the city's Near North Side.

Schmidt, Garden & Martin, Catalog House architects



Richard E. Schmidt

Hugh M.G. Garden

Richard Ernest Schmidt (1865-1958), the senior partner of "Richard E. Schmidt, Garden and Martin, architects" was born in Bavaria, Germany. After coming to Chicago following the Civil War, the family settled on the Near North Side.

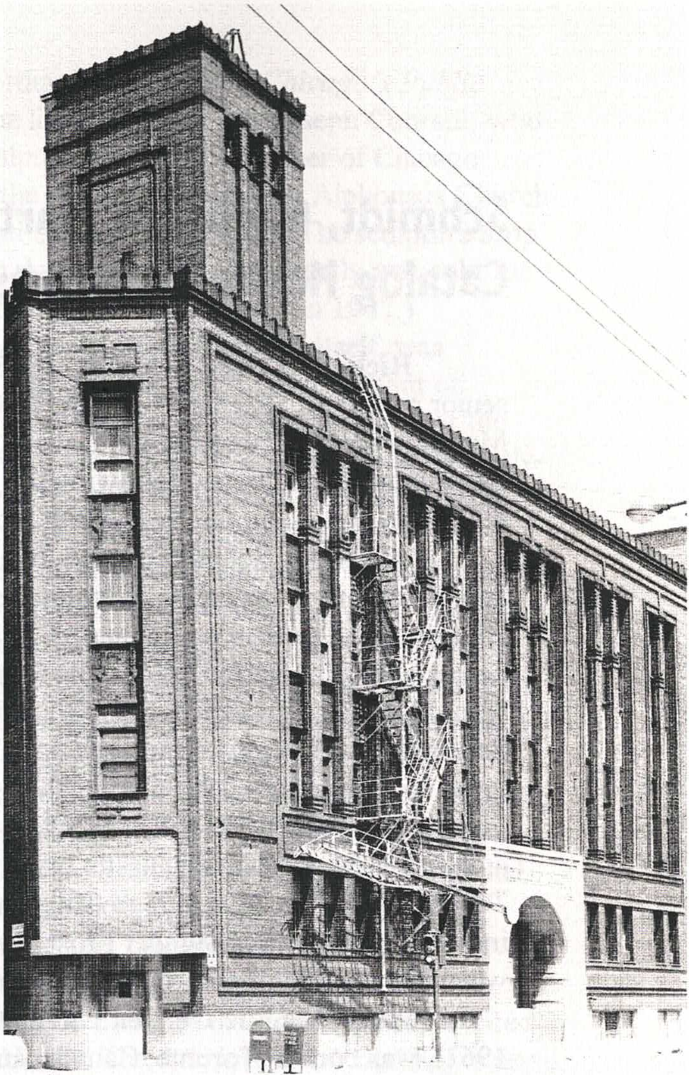
At age 16, Schmidt began a two-year apprenticeship in the office of architects Cudell and Blumenthal. The firm's principal, Adolph Cudell, is perhaps best known for his designs for the Dewes House (503 W. Wrightwood; 1896) and the Schoenhofen Brewery Administration Building (18th and Canalport; 1886), both Chicago Landmarks. From 1883 to 1885, Schmidt studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After returning to Chicago, he worked in the firm of Charles Sumner Frost until 1887, when he began his own architectural practice.

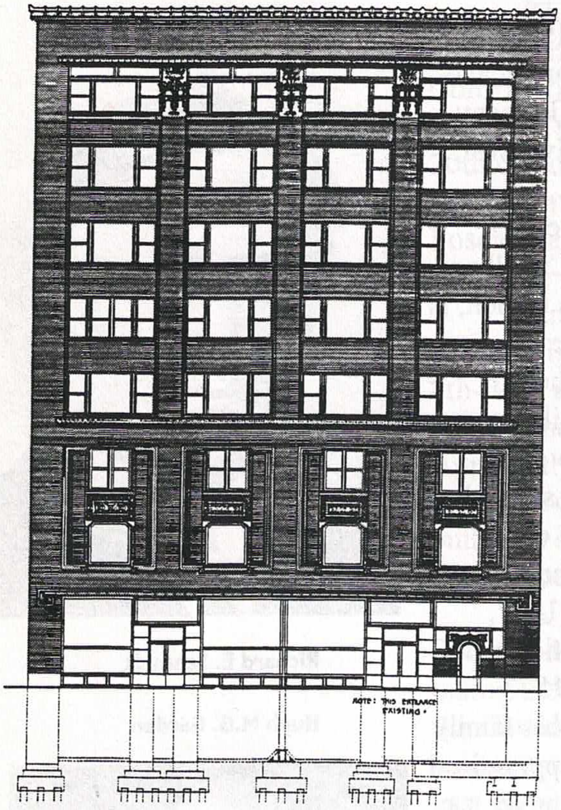
Hugh Mackie Gorden Garden (1873-1961), was born in Toronto, Canada, and his family moved in the late-1880s to Chicago. He apprenticed as a draftsman in the offices of several notable firms, including Flanders & Zimmerman, Henry Ives Cobb, and Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge. He then became a freelance renderer, which brought him jobs with Louis Sullivan, Howard Van Doren Shaw, and Frank Lloyd Wright.

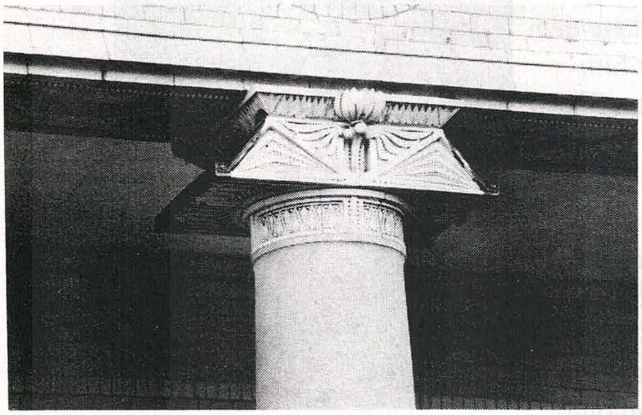
In 1895, he began a long association with the firm of Richard E. Schmidt. Their cooperative efforts were formalized in 1906 when, joined by structural engineer **Edgar D. Martin (1871-1951)**, they organized under the name of "Richard E. Schmidt, Garden & Martin, architects." The long collaboration was marked by a significant amount of professional success, owing in part to the complementary nature of each partner.

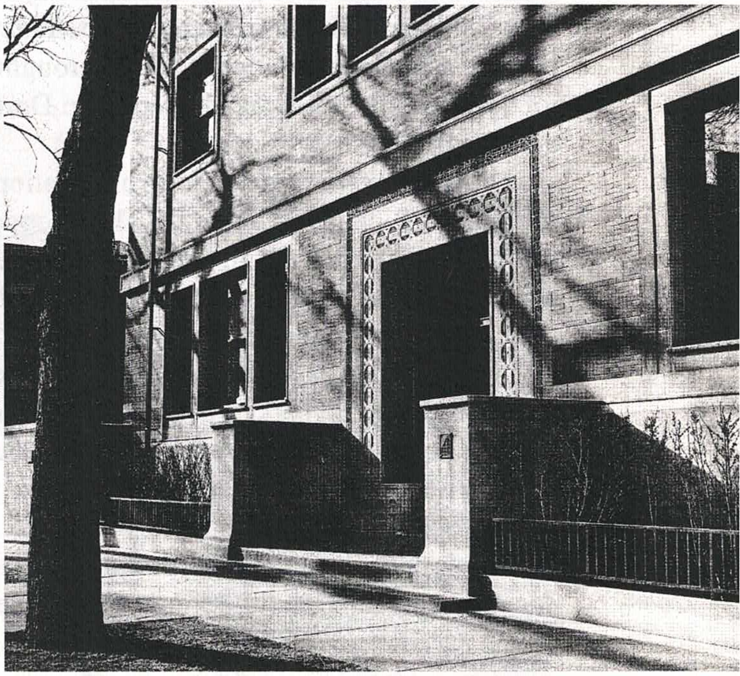
Schmidt brought business acumen, administrative ability, and important civic and social connections. As the son of a prominent

By the time of the Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House, architects Richard E. Schmidt and Hugh M.G. Garden already were highly regarded for their progressive, "modern" designs, such as (clockwise, from right): the Schoenhofen Brewery Powerhouse; the Madlener House; the Third Church of Christ, Scientist (now the Metropolitan Baptist Church); and the Chapin & Gore Building.









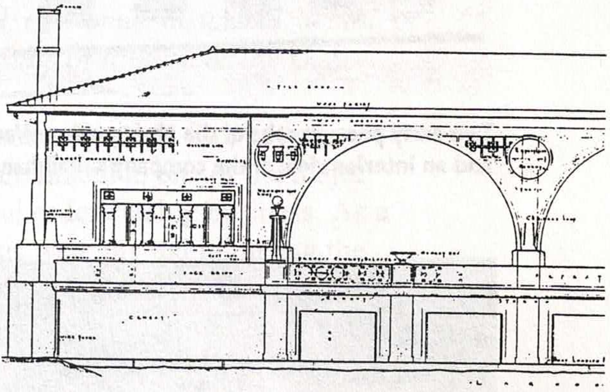
surgeon, Schmidt had strong connections to the medical profession. His pioneering textbook, *The Modern Hospital* (1914), helped bring the firm hundreds of hospital commissions, including Michael Reese Hospital (1906). The firm's work for Montgomery Ward & Co. was said to have been due to Schmidt's membership in a bicycle club that also included retailer A. Montgomery Ward.

Garden, in contrast, brought the imagination, inventiveness, and sensitivity of the skilled designer. Noted Garden's daughter after her father's death: "Richard Schmidt had his feet firmly on the ground; father had his head in the clouds."

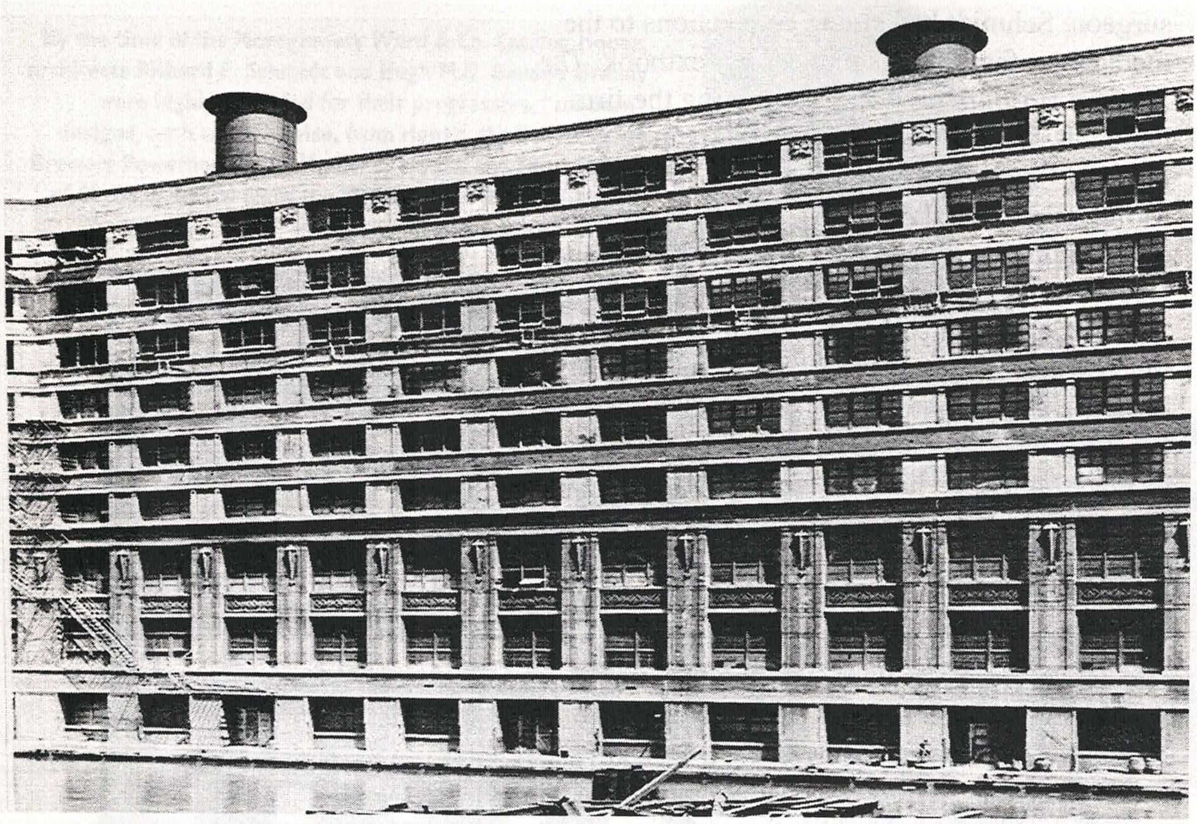
The third partner, Martin, was an extremely skilled structural engineer who was able to solve the technical problems involved with large industrial buildings and such new materials as reinforced concrete. Martin remained with the firm until 1925, when he joined the architectural partnership of Pond & Pond. He was replaced by Carl A. Erikson.

The firm's work was widely published, both in period architectural publications and in current architectural histories. Although known primarily for their commercial and industrial designs, they designed two noteworthy residences: the Theurer-Wrigley House (2466 Lakeview Ave.; built 1895) and the Madlener House (4 W. Burton Pl.; 1902).

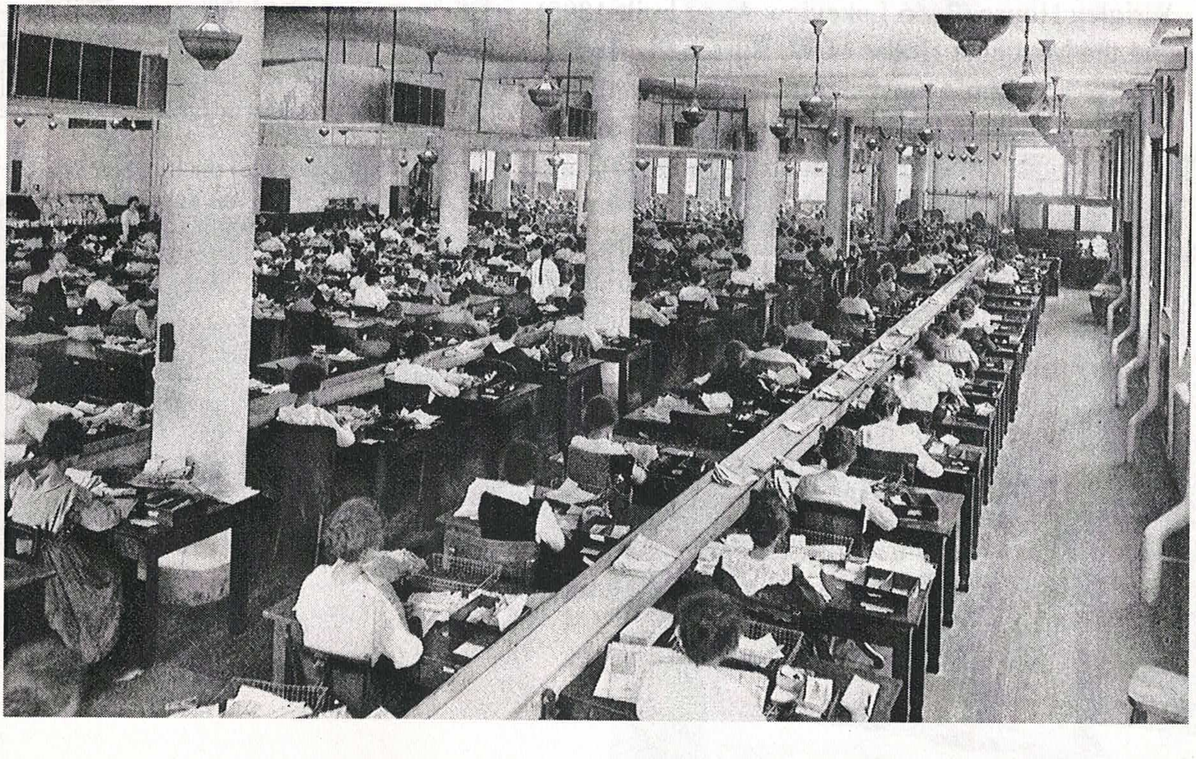
The firm's most significant commercial buildings include the Montgomery Ward Tower (6 N. Michigan Ave.; 1898) and the Chapin & Gore Building (63 E. Adams St.; 1904), while their most well-known religious design is for the Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church (2151 W. Washington Blvd.; 1901). The firm's hospital commissions include Michael Reese (2838 S. Ellis Ave.; 1905); and, besides the Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House, the firm's most-influential industrial design was for the Schoenhofen Brewery Powerhouse (18th and Canalport; 1902). Garden also collaborated with famed Prairie School landscape architect Jens Jensen on the design of the Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion (1906-07).



A drawing detail for the Humboldt Park Boathouse, which was built at the same time as the Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House.



Two early photographs of the Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House: as it appeared during construction (above) and an interior view of the company's mail handling room (below).



APPENDICES

Criteria for Designation

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks has long expressed interest in the potential designation of the Montgomery Ward & Co. Chicago Avenue complex as a Chicago Landmark, dating back to an initial research report in 1975.

According to the Chicago Municipal Code (Section 2-210-620, 630), the Landmarks Commission has the authority to recommend a building or district for landmark status if it determines that it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for landmark designation," as well as possesses a significant amount of "integrity."

Based on the findings in this report, the following should be considered by the Commission in regards to a recommendation to designate the Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House and Administration Building as a Chicago Landmark:

CRITERION 1 *(Critical Part of City's Heritage)*

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historical, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the U. S.

As the longtime headquarters of the Montgomery Ward & Co., both the **Catalog House** and the **Administration Building** are linked to one of the major chapters in the history of American retailing: the mail order catalog business. As a revolutionary concept in retailing, mail order catalogs were pivotal in raising the standard of living for the American farmer and in bringing agrarian society into the mainstream of American life. Although most of these large companies no longer sell by catalog, the tremendous impact of mail order sales continues to the present.

In particular, Wards was an integral part of the development of Chicago's mercantile community, and the development of the catalog business was one of the key factors in the city's rapid rise to commercial and industrial prominence during the last decades of the 19th century.

Both Wards buildings are clearly linked to the heritage of Chicago, Illinois, *and* the United States. This fact was recognized in 1978, when they were listed as a National Historic Landmark, the nation's highest level of recognition.

CRITERION 3 *(Significant Person)*

Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

The **Catalog House** is identified with the life of one of the city's most prominent individuals, A. Montgomery Ward, a nationally known merchandising pioneer who turned the concept of mail-order selling into a thriving and respectable industry throughout the United States.

Ward moved to Chicago following the Civil War, founding his small retailing business in 1872 on the top floor of a loft building on North Clark Street. Within a decade, sales were over $1 million, and the mail-order catalog had won a lasting place in the annals of retailing history.

Ward remained active in the company through the first decade of the 20th century, and was integral in moving its corporate offices and warehouse operations to the present-day Chicago River location. He personally commissioned the design of the Catalog House structure at that site, which was built in 1907-08.

Ward brought the same initiative and zealousness to his extensive civic and philanthropic affairs in Chicago. One of his most important legacies to the city in this regard is Grant Park which, following decades of protracted legal battles, he was able to save from commercial development.

CRITERION 4 *(Important Architecture)*

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

The Montgomery Ward & Co. **Catalog House** is one of the nation's best industrial examples of the Chicago School, an architectural style that was influential in the development of modern architecture. "It stands by itself as one of the most powerful works of utilitarian architecture that our building art has produced," wrote noted architectural historian Carl Condit.

The design of the Catalog House embodies the distinguishing features of the so-called second generation of the Chicago School style of architecture, which took place in the early-20th century. While adherring to the style's well-known "form follows function" dictum (e.g., broad windows and strongly horizontal design), the building also incorporates a wide variety of the type of rich, yet subtle ornamentation common to the work of noted Chicago School architects Hugh M.G. Garden, Louis Sullivan, and Frank Lloyd Wright.

The Catalog House is doubly impressive for being one of the nation's earliest and largest examples of a structure built completely of reinforced concrete, a type of innovative construction that was lauded at the time as an outstanding technological achievement. The building's impressive design is a testament to the ability of architecture to transform a simple, massive warehouse into an outstanding work of art. As one architecture critic wrote of the Catalog House (1908): "The handling of different materials has been the basis for the invention of new forms....of repetition and order it makes rhythm; from monotony it draws repose."

CRITERION 5 *(Important Architect)*

Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

The **Catalog House** was designed by one of the city's most important and notable architectural firms of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. "Richard E.

Schmidt, Garden and Martin, architects" was widely acclaimed for the originality and exceptionally high quality of their work, both by architects and architectural critics at the time and, later, by such respected architectural historians as Allen Brooks, Carl Condit, and Siegfrid Giedion.

Richard Schmidt, the firm's senior partner, was considered an exceptional architectural engineer, as well as one of the nation's premier hospital designers. His book, *The Modern Hospital* (1914), is considered one of the pioneering textbooks of the profession. One of his partners, Edgar D. Martin, was acknowledged as one of his generation's leading construction engineers, a position further established by Martin's early and innovative accomplishments in the area of reinforced concrete construction.

The firm's partner in charge of design, Hugh M. G. Garden, is widely considered to be one of the leading figures in the Chicago School style of architecture. Garden's distinctive and progressive style of architecture influenced a generation of architects; today, he is regarded as one of the major shapers of early-20th century architecture. Garden's unique style of design is displayed in the distinctive ornament, strongly geometric forms, and intricate masonry details of his various works, designs that continue to influence modern architecture. Even his name was used to coin a distinct style of ornamentation, known at the time as "Gardenesque."

The firm's architectural mastery was broad-based, including: commercial (Chapin & Gore Building), industrial (Schoenhofen Brewery), residential (Theurer-Wrigley and Madlener), religious (Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church), and hospital (Michael Reese) designs. Virtually all of the above buildings have been designated as local or national landmarks; yet, it is the Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House that is considered to be one of the firm's most accomplished and widely influential works.

CRITERION 7 *(Unique Visual Feature)*

Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the city.

The Montgomery Ward & Co. Chicago Avenue Plant is truly one of the city's most well established and familiar visual features--a landmark not just of the River North neighborhood but of the entire city of Chicago.

The dramatic curving form of the **Catalog House**, whose distinctive trapezoidal-shaped contour adheres to a bend in the North Branch of the Chicago River, ranks as one of the city's most notable visual, architectural, and industrial images--and one of the most impressive structures along the entire length of the river.

The distinctive setback tower and bronze sculpture of the **Administration Building** can be seen for miles, including the length of Chicago Avenue. Its silhouette against the setting sun ranks as one of the skyline's most memorable visual features, especially as viewed by hundreds of thousands of visitors along North Michigan Avenue. Its prominence at night is further heightened by the dramatic illumination of its sculpture and tower.

INTEGRITY

The integrity (of the proposed landmark) must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and ability to express its historic, community, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value.

The Montgomery Ward & Co. **Catalog House and Administration Building** both possess an extraordinary amount of their original integrity--in terms of their location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship.

Very few alterations have been made to the buildings, particularly in light of their tremendous length (between 50 and 65 bays on their east and west elevations). The most noticeable change are the series of northern additions to the Catalog House, whose location obscures only a small portion of the original building.

The other minimal alterations (e.g., painting of exterior, selected replacement of windows) in no way detract from the two buildings' historic, community, architectural, or aesthetic value.

Significant Historical and Architectural Features

Whenever a building or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant features" of the property. This is done to enable both the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historic and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

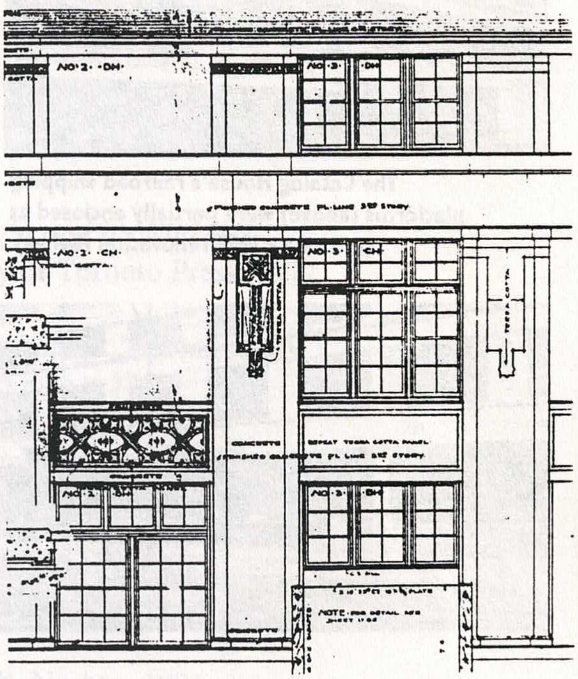
Based on its evaluation of the Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House and Administration Building, the Commission staff recommends that the significant historical and architectural features for the preservation of this building be:

< all building elevations, including their rooflines.

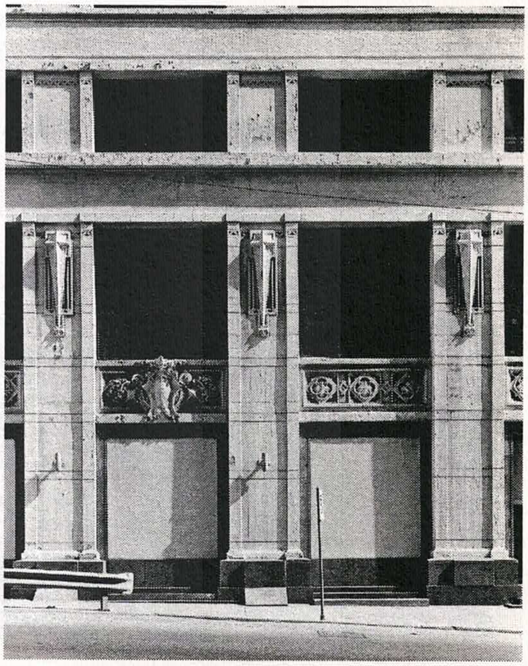
Building Rehabilitation Issues

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks bases its review of all city-issued permits related to a landmark property on its adopted *Guidelines for Alterations to Historic Buildings and New Construction.* The purpose of the Commission's review is to protect and enhance the landmark's existing "historical and architectural features."

The Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House and Administration Building retain virtually all of their original exterior features. Due to their extraordinary size, however, we are listing the minimal exceptions:

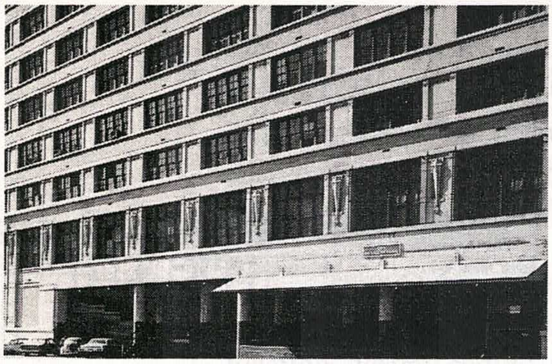


A detail from the Catalog House construction drawings (above), showing the original lower-level door and window configurations along Chicago Avenue. Below: The same area, as it appeared in a 1986 photograph.

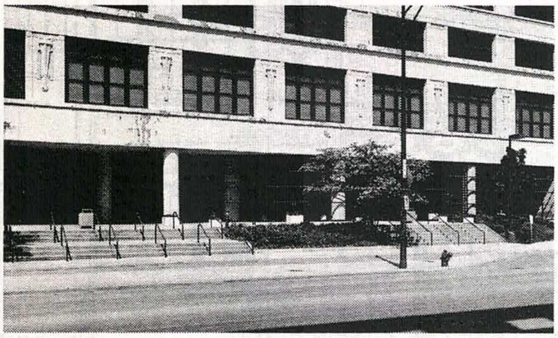


Catalog House (built 1907-08)

- *Selected window replacements--upper stories.* The original 4:4 (west and south elevations) and 2:2 (east elevation) wood sash windows are grouped three per window opening on the upper six stories, except in groups of four over the entrance to the former railroad shipping area. They are extant, except for nine bays (of a total of 35) on both the east and west elevations, where they have been replaced (c.1975) by aluminum 1:1 windows.
- *Selected window replacements--lower stories.* Again, the original wood windows are largely extant, with the except of nine bays on both the east and west elevations. Due to the taller height of these lower stories, the original windows are 4:4:4; the replacements are 1:1:1 and their groupings are similar to those of the upper stories. In a few instances, the ground floor windows have been bricked in; e.g., at the river level and facing Larrabee Street. The portion of the building facing Kingsbury retains its original loading dock areas.
- *Selected door/window replacements--south elevation.* The original, grade-level windows and doors facing Chicago Avenue have been altered slightly. The western four bays have been filled in with artificial stucco panels, while the eastern three bays feature smaller doorways set within artificial stucco panels. The original terra cotta and granite door surrounds are still extant.
- *Enclosure of railroad shipping docks.* The grade-level railroad loading area on the east elevation,



The Catalog House's railroad shipping platforms (above) were partially enclosed as part of a c.1975 renovation (below).



which originally was open to admit railroad boxcars was partially enclosed--and the entrance grade raised--c.1975, in order to accommodate a modern office lobby. This alteration, which was sensitively done, retains the original round piers and openness of the loading area. The original railroad tracks paralleling Larabee Street were replaced by landscaping, except for a small remaining segment along Kingsbury.

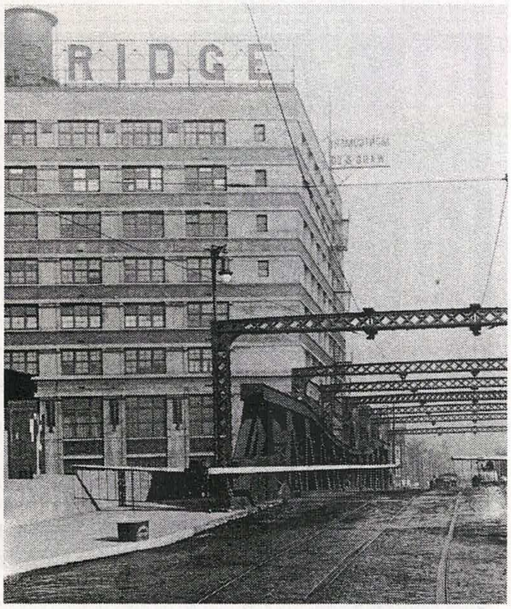
- *Exterior painting*. As mentioned elsewhere in the report, the exterior of the original Catalog House, as well as its 1917 addition, was painted a uniform cream color c.1930. Beneath the layers of paint are the original building colors: the light gray of the reinforced concrete and the dark reddish brown of the brick spandrels and of the terra cotta ornament.
- *Sill alterations*. The only other noticeable alteration occurs on six bays of the the original 35-bay length of the west elevation, between the fourth and fifth levels, where portions of the continuous concrete sills have been lowered slightly for some indeterminate reason. These windows also have been altered from the original design.

Catalog House Additions (built 1917, 1940, 1970)

- *Selected window replacements.* The original windows survive on most of the east, west, and north elevations of the additions, including the large casement-style windows on the 1917 addition, facing Kingsbury.

Administration Building (built 1928-29)

- *Window replacement.* The majority of the original windows were replaced, c.1975. Unlike the former full-height windows, the new 1:1 aluminum windows incorporate a solid panel at their top.
- *Storefront alteration.* The lower two floors of the north and east elevations were modernized, c.1975, with a new granite base. This was done at the time that a new corporate headquarters structure opened immediately to the east.



Left: **A 1915 photograph of the Catalog House, as viewed from the west, demonstrating the building's original two-tone color scheme.**

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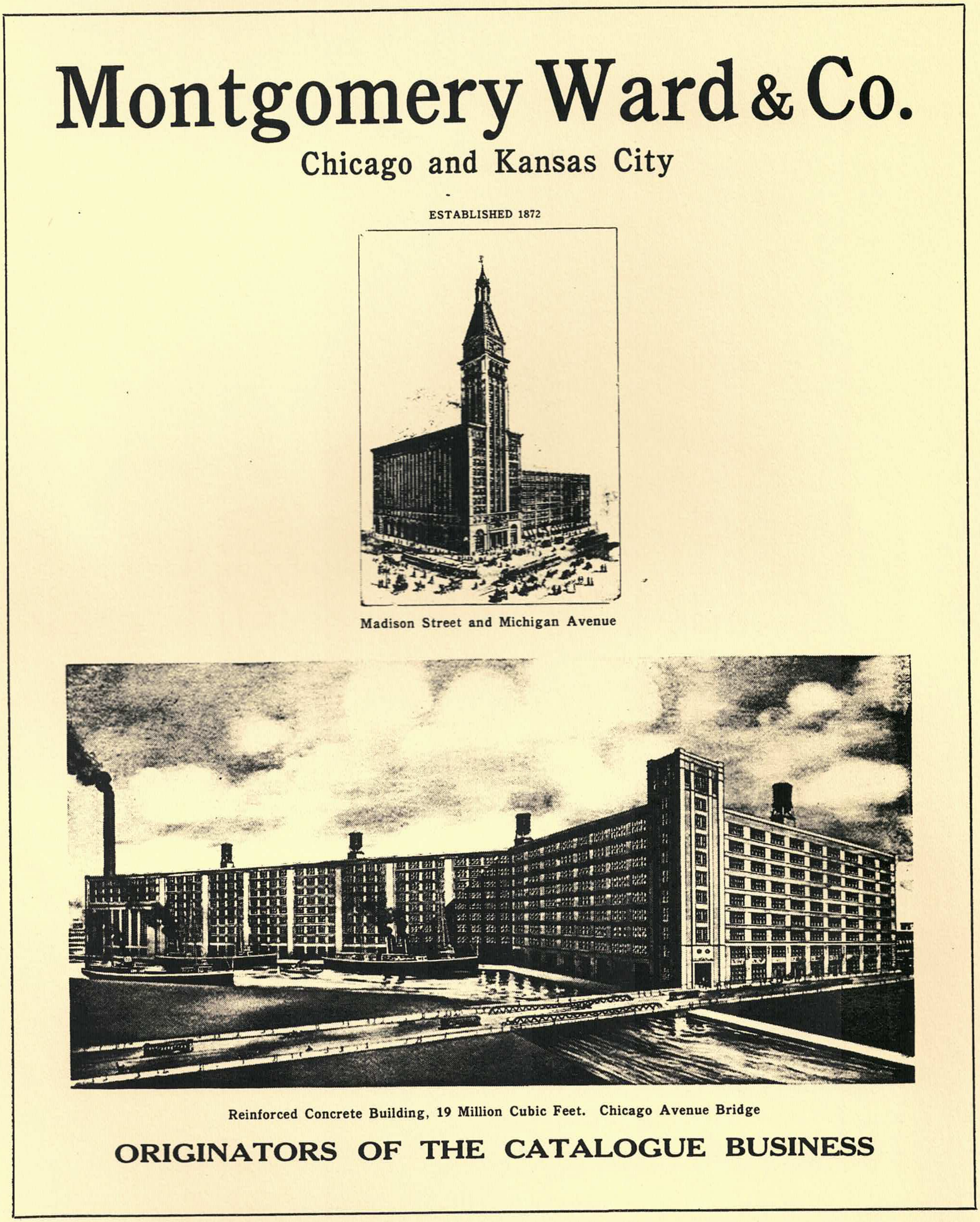


Montgomery Ward & Co.

Chicago and Kansas City

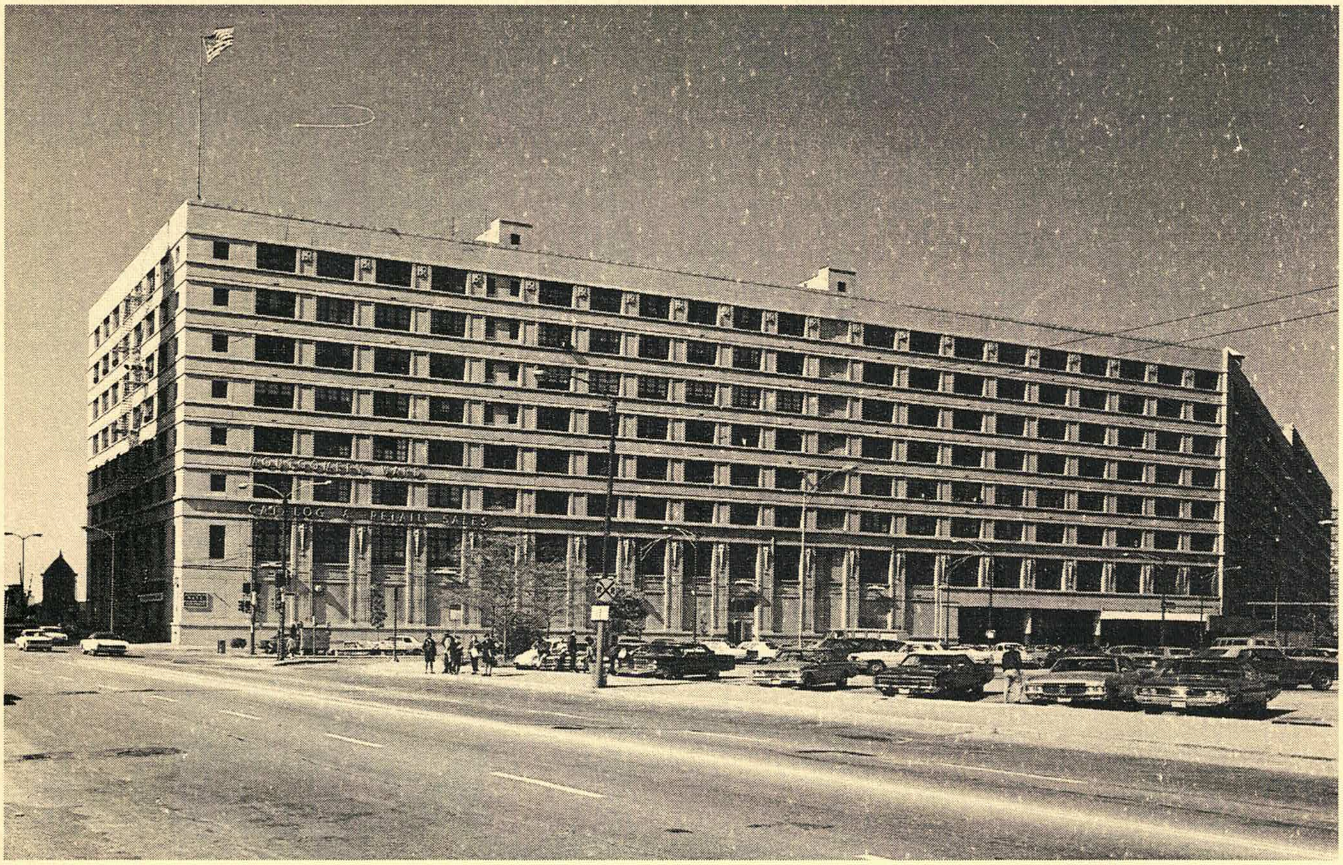
ESTABLISHED 1872

Madison Street and Michigan Avenue

Reinforced Concrete Building, 19 Million Cubic Feet. Chicago Avenue Bridge

ORIGINATORS OF THE CATALOGUE BUSINESS

An advertisement from a 1910 business directory. The corner tower on the Catalog House (bottom) is an artist's fabrication; it was never intended to be built. Note the ships servicing the riverside loading docks.



A 1970 photograph, by Richard Nickel, of the Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House.

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